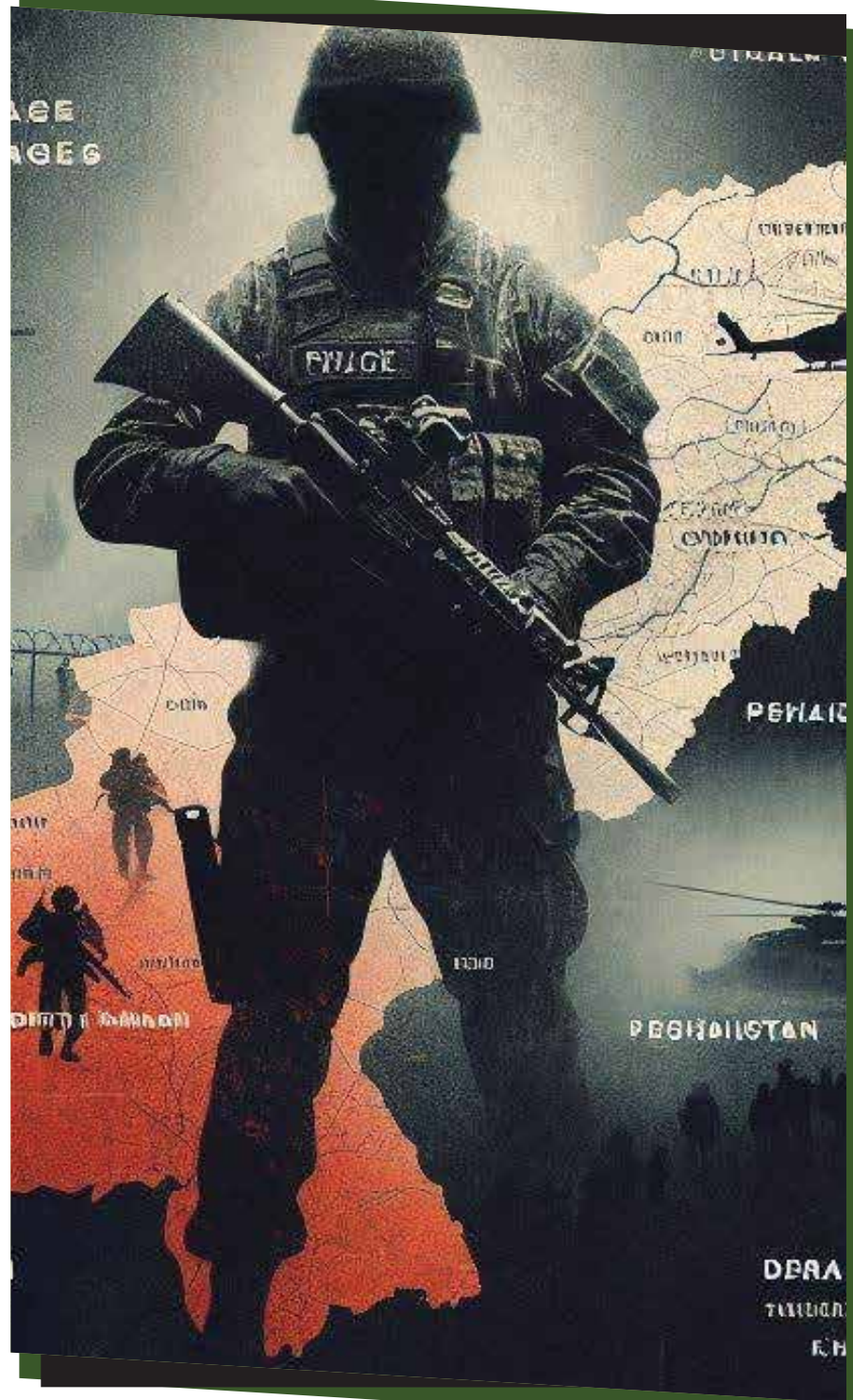


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# Elusive justice

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IN Pakistan, justice of any form is, more often than not, difficult to come by. Recently, judges and prosecutors from across the country found themselves in agreement at a seminar in Karachi on the need to urgently reform the colonial-era Code of Criminal Procedure, which, it seemed from the discussion, was the biggest hurdle they faced in ensuring justice.

Several other proposals also came forth, among which were some to improve the investigation and prosecution of criminal activity through improved coordination and communication between investigators and prosecutors, with a view to preventing the collapse of cases due to insufficient or defective evidence.

Other recommendations included the introduction of deterrent measures to prevent frivolous and false litigation, a pervasive issue plaguing the legal system. Yet more changes were sought from the legislative branch, including depoliticisation of the police and proactive legislation on legal reforms from the political leadership.

One need only conduct a brief survey of those who have come into contact with the legal system to realise that it is fundamentally broken. From antediluvian laws to a corrupt enforcement apparatus, from a perennially understaffed judicial system to inept prosecution and perverse penal systems – none work towards ensuring justice, one of the most basic duties of any state towards its citizens. These days, it is just as common for the accused to walk free in instances where it seems obvious that a crime has been committed as it is for a seemingly innocent citizen to be punished for an obviously fabricated crime for which there is no compelling evidence on the record. It is no wonder, then, that victims often run from the justice system, instead of turning to it: they would rather resign themselves to living with injustice than dare to hope for reparations from the state.

A similar sentiment was expressed by former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on the same day the Pakistan Prosecution Forum was discussing reforms. Perhaps exasperated by an accountability case which has, by Mr Abbasi's account, "been pending for five years without progress", the politician said the country "will not progress till NAB exists". NAB, the state's tool of choice for putting out-of-favour politicians out of commission, has provided some of the most prominent examples of how perverted our legal system can be. However, as discussed earlier, the actual problem is much deeper. Till the Pakistani justice system institutionalises the fundamental principles of justice – fairness, equality and entitlement – it cannot fulfil its responsibilities. It also seems that the tools it is equipped with – ie, various laws and procedures – are insufficient for this purpose. Therefore, the legislature needs to step up and address the existing deficiencies in the legal system. This is one of the most pressing issues of our time.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 4, 2024**

# Creeping militancy

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WHILE military personnel and LEAs have mostly been targeted in the current wave of militancy, the list of targets is by no means limited to security men. Politicians and public figures are also in the terrorists' cross hairs, as the tragic killing of former senator Hidayatullah Khan in Bajaur on Wednesday shows. Khan was killed, along with four others, in an IED blast while on his way to a campaign event in connection with a KP provincial by-election. Though no claims of responsibility have yet emerged, police officials have called the blast an act of terrorism. The grim fact is that Bajaur and other tribal parts of KP have witnessed steady militant activity over the last few years. On the day the former senator was targeted, the military said it had killed a "high-profile terrorist" in Bajaur. Terrorists in the past have also targeted political figures and events. In January, Rehan Zeb, a young politician contesting the general elections, was assassinated in Bajaur, while a massive bombing in July 2023 targeting a JUI-F rally in the same district resulted in over 50 fatalities. The latter atrocity was claimed by the ISKP terrorist group.

Considering that the plethora of militant groups that operate in the country are stridently opposed to democracy, Hidayatullah Khan's killing – and similar incidents before it – is perhaps designed to send a chilling message to political forces to steer clear of what the terrorists consider to be their stomping grounds. The culprits could include anyone – from ISKP and the TTP to any of the offshoots that have sprung from these deadly outfits. The names are, in fact, immaterial; what is important is for the state to ensure that no part of Pakistan is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. KP and Balochistan are particularly vulnerable in this respect. But the militants cannot be allowed to stifle political activity and prevent citizens from organising and expressing themselves. While local communities may not be in favour of full-scale military operations, the state needs to use all other tools at its disposal to secure these vulnerable areas and make sure that the lives and properties of citizens are safe. The administration recently launched its Azm-i-Istehkam campaign with great fanfare; ensuring security in areas worst hit by militancy must be the central plank of this campaign.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 5, 2024**

# Dodging culpability

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It is high time the judiciary put an end to the culture of impunity that has allowed the missing persons crisis to persist. In a significant decision, the Islamabad High Court recently dismissed a set of appeals against fines imposed on the defence and interior secretaries, the Islamabad chief commissioner and several police officers for failing to recover three persons who have been missing for years. Before making its decision, the division bench asked if the government had, after the fine was imposed, succeeded in determining the whereabouts of the missing individuals, to which the additional attorney general, representing the errant officials, replied in the negative. Wondering whether the government was still “waiting for a miracle”, the court observed that the authorities repeatedly seek time in such cases but then “do nothing” to recover the missing. This, in fact, is the long and short of the government’s strategy to deal with the growing number of citizens going ‘missing’ each year.

It is a galling situation: it is no secret why citizens are routinely disappeared, and who most commonly does the disappearing. Yet, state representatives act oblivious or, worse, attempt to gaslight the grieving families. Meanwhile, fundamental rights are violated, families torn apart, and deep anti-state resentment grows, especially in communities that are routinely targeted. Then, when officials are held responsible for their obvious failures, they hide behind extensive legal defences and technicalities of the law to avoid accountability for their complicity. Perpetrators and their protectors’ ability to leverage power and state resources to seek legal protections even as they abuse the law themselves makes it all the more imperative for the superior judiciary to say ‘enough’ and refuse to become a part of this vicious cycle. Unless senior officials are held to account for failing in their responsibilities, it is unlikely that they will work sincerely to end the practice of disappearing citizens.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 5, 2024**

# The privacy myth

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FARIEHA AZIZ

A RECENT order by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in the audio leaks case now establishes on record what was surmised all along: no warrant has ever been sought under the Investigation for Fair Trial Act, 2013, for surveillance. This is important because it goes to the heart of lawmaking in an environment where draconian laws are routinely enacted and overbroad powers are written into them for the executive with the ruse of judicial oversight presented as an adequate safeguard. The executive overreaches and no 'safeguard' in the law prevents it from doing so in practice, absent a rule of law environment and any enforcement of existing checks in the law and Constitution.

Here's a law that was presented as a check on the executive's surveillance powers. Surveillance of citizens is the norm and the existence of a legal framework to check this practice has proven to be wholly ineffective. The fact that no warrant has been obtained in 11 years, points to a culture of impunity where the executive, in all these years, has felt brazen enough to carry out surveillance and not fulfil legal requirements — because who is going to hold them to account for it?

Who allows the executive to get away with excesses if not the judiciary? Courts are not in the habit of holding the executive to account — there are very few exceptions — especially when it's about access to citizens' data and devices for 'investigation' or 'national security'.

Everyone rides on the assumption that the executive must and can conduct surveillance or access data. Lawful or not, this practice has been normalised. When was the last time that a warrant for search and seizure, disclosure of content data or court permission for real-time collection and recording of data under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, was sought? Yet, the seizing of devices, accessing data on them and admission of such 'evidence' in court is a common practice. The doctrine of necessity mostly prevails. Requirements in the law for warrants, due process, reasoned orders, are ignored as though these are mere asides. Why then would the executive feel compelled to abide by checks which the judiciary itself does not enforce?

But even if warrants are sought, can they check technology which monitors in real-time and at scale? Such is the insidious nature of technology, once procured and operationalised, how exactly will warrants and judicial oversight apply? Who is checking on a minute-by-minute basis, who is being surveilled, to what degree and what end? What capacity do courts have to understand the tech involved and its implications on privacy? What on-paper guardrails can possibly extend to such technology?

The 'Lawful' Intercept Management System, which is rightly referred to as a surveillance centre in the IHC order, is not shocking because everyone knows this is happening. Back in 2013, in a hearing before the Sindh High Court, a lawyer representing a telco insisted before the bench that systems had been deployed and data was handed over to the government, so why did they block their services?

But who uses an open line to speak if they can avoid it? SMSes are obsolete for day-to-day communication and, for the most part, serve primarily as a junk folder for spam advertisements. So how are calls and messages through encrypted channels being monitored and recorded? Is it by targeting devices of individuals or more broad based? Through what methods?

The real question here is what is happening with encrypted data. The order notes: "To the extent that any encrypted material (created through use of mobile apps, etc.) forms part of the consumer data, the encrypted material is also shared with the monitoring centre at the Surveillance Centre. The Lawful Intercept Management System does not provide automated means to decrypt such encrypted data. But requests for decryption can be made to the relevant company that owns the social media application."

But it's the company route that the state has also sought to circumvent by procuring and deploying technology to access, monitor and decrypt data. They want direct access and these aims are also reflected in proposed legislation – ironically – the Personal Data Protection Bill.

Over the years, various filtering and surveillance technology has been purchased and put to use in Pakistan. In 2012, a tender was floated to procure a national URL filtering system. Ultimately this was shelved, but these aspirations were not. In 2013, Citizen Lab reports revealed the presence of Netsweeper and FinFisher in Pakistan. In 2019, Sandvine's deep packet inspection technology was deployed. This year, press conferences by the caretaker set-up mentioned upgrading of web-monitoring systems. A mere Google search throws up various procurement documents on the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority's website. In recent weeks, there has been much speculation around a firewall that seemingly has been installed – allegedly with help from China. Pakistan has long aspired to take the China route in terms of information control and monitoring of society.

What has come up in relation to the firewall is its ability with respect to encrypted content because such filtering is not limited to content but veers into the sphere of data privacy. Decrypting or breaking encryption from the outside would mean breaking through transport layer security which is not limited to certain data or platforms, but everything flowing through the network making it insecure and affecting secure transactions whether entering passwords or banking information.

Several questions arise. What is happening to encrypted data flowing through Pakistan's networks, at what scale and through which tech tools? With whom does the legal authority to procure invasive technology lie – if at all – to monitor and decrypt data: through which legal instrument? Is what is 'legal' also constitutional or right?

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 6, 2024**

# Army captain martyred in exchange of fire with terrorists in KP's North Waziristan

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A Pakistan Army captain was martyred in an exchange of fire with terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, according to the military's media wing.

A statement from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that Captain Muhammad Osama bin Arshad, 24, resident of Rawalpindi district, was martyred during a fire exchange between security forces and terrorists in the district.

"During the fierce engagement, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location, as result of which two terrorists were sent to hell."

The ISPR added that he led his troops from the front and "having fought gallantly, made the ultimate sacrifice and embraced martyrdom".

The ISPR said a sanitisation operation was being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area.

"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 banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group claimed responsibility for the incident. Paying tribute to the martyr, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the war against terrorism would continue until the menace was rooted out.

"The nation salutes the soldiers who stand like an iron wall against terrorists," he said.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said the nation would forever remember the martyr's sacrifice and extended his condolences to the captain's family. Nine terrorists were killed by the security forces in two separate operations in Khyber and Lakki Marwat districts last week. Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in the past year, especially in KP and Balochistan after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

According to an annual security report issued by the Centre for Research and Security Studies, Pakistan witnessed 1,524 violence-related fatalities and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations in 2023 – marking a record six-year high.

KP and Balochistan were the primary centres of violence, accounting for over 90 per cent of all fatalities and 84pc of attacks, including incidents of terrorism and security forces operations.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 9, 2024

# Policed state

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PAKISTAN is under grave threat from its own citizens, or so the interior ministry would have us believe. According to a recent statement made before the Sindh High Court on behalf of the ministry, the government feels it necessary to keep the ban on X in place because it considers the social media platform a “threat to peace and national security”.

The statement reads: “hostile elements operating on X have nefarious intentions to create an environment of chaos and instability, with the ultimate goal of destabilising the country and plunging it into some form of anarchy”. For anyone aware of Pakistan’s sociopolitical context, it is not difficult to guess who is being described as ‘hostile elements’. There are many disgruntled and disillusioned citizens who have taken to using the platform to vent their frustrations against state institutions that clearly appear unnerved by the unchecked criticism and would like to see them silenced. The ban on X, the interior ministry says, does not curtail freedom of expression or restrict access to information. In fact, ‘it is a measure aimed at ensuring responsible use of social media platforms’. But how does completely blocking access to a global platform encourage responsible use of social media? And how does silencing all Pakistani citizens on X contribute towards national stability and democratic governance? The government does not shed light on these questions.

Meanwhile, another recent development provides a fresh example of how extensively constitutional freedoms are being encroached upon. Following the uncovering of a mass surveillance apparatus spying on potentially millions of citizens, the government has, through an SRO, formally allowed intelligence personnel to intercept and trace calls of any citizen “in the interest of national security”. To be clear, this was already being done, albeit without warrants or legal sanction. It will now continue with legal sanction, but likely still without warrants. The PML-N-led government must be asked: what is it thinking, giving up important personal protections under the pretext of ‘national security’? Even if the circumstances demand enhanced powers for security institutions, these should not be conceded without adequate checks and balances in place. There are many seasoned politicians within its ranks who should know better than to expect such measures to yield positive results in the long run. Likewise, silencing social media is no solution to the actual problem of growing public discontent, which is being augmented by the government’s poor policies. What is needed most right now is for Pakistan to be as accommodative of competing narratives as possible. It would be prudent, therefore, to spend more energy understanding and addressing public concerns rather than treating everyone as an enemy. Suppressing a restless public and blocking dissent will only create more frustrations, which may spill over in unforeseen ways.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 10, 2024



## 2 soldiers, 2 police officers martyred in intelligence-based operation in Peshawar's Hassan Khel

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Two Pakistan Army soldiers and as many police officers were martyred in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Peshawar district's Hassan Khel area, according to the military's media wing.

A statement from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said a joint IBO was conducted by security forces and the police based on the reported presence of a "high profile terrorist".

It added that "high-value target" terrorist commander Abdul Raheem, and two other militants "were sent to hell" after an intense exchange of fire.

"Raheem was highly wanted by the law enforcement agencies and government had fixed head money of Rs6 million on him, as he remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities, and was also responsible for martyrdom of Captain Hussain Jehangir and Havildar Shafiq Ullah on May 26, 2024," the ISPR said.

It added that the operation “avenged the heinous act and has brought the main perpetrator to justice”, further saying that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the militants.

The ISPR said the Pakistan Army’s 34-year-old Sepoy Muhammad Idrees, a resident of Swabi district and 34-year-old Sepoy Badam Gul, a resident of Kohat district and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Counter Terrorism Department’s 38-year-old Sub-Inspector (SI) Tajmir Shah, a resident of Peshawar district and 34-year-old Assistant SI Muhammad Akram, a resident of Mansehra district “fought gallantly” in the IBO and were martyred.

“Pakistan’s security forces stand shoulder to shoulder with other law enforcement agencies to ensure peace and stability across of Pakistan and such sacrifices of our brave men further strengthen our resolve,” the ISPR said.

President Asif Ali Zardari paid tribute to the martyrs and said the nation stood behind security forces in the fight against terrorism.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the nation saluted the martyrs for the sacrifice. He also lauded the army and police for killing the three terrorists.

“KP police officers and men have made history in the war against terrorism with their precious blood,” said Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The incident comes a day after eight people – five security officials and three children – lost their lives in three separate incidents in Lakki Marwat, North and South Waziristan districts.

A military officer was martyred in an exchange of fire with militants in North Waziristan, while three soldiers lost their lives in an attack, and 12 others were injured in the South Waziristan district. Separately, a police officer and his three minor nephews lost their lives in Lakki Marwat district.

Nine terrorists were killed by the security forces in two separate operations in Khyber and Lakki Marwat districts last week.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in the past year, especially in KP and Balochistan after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

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KP and Balochistan were the primary centres of violence, accounting for over 90 per cent of all fatalities and 84pc of attacks, including incidents of terrorism and security forces operations.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 10, 2024**

# Jailbreak Saga Continues

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DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

At an international police chiefs' conference, each chief shared a meticulously crafted plan on how to respond to a crisis. When it was the Pakistani police chief's turn to contribute, he merely shrugged and said: "I won't do anything. The moment a major incident occurs, I'll be suspended and replaced by a new chief. He will decide how to handle the situation."

This is exactly how the official response to the recent jailbreak in Poonch, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, has played out. The head of the facility was suspended after 19 inmates escaped. One would assume that he must have had some merit to have been given the position in the first place, and if not, perhaps those responsible for his appointment should have been held accountable. But we digress.

Dramatic jailbreaks seem to occur with a darkly comedic frequency in Pakistan. Militant-led assaults on prison facilities, like the Bannu (2012) and Dera Ismail Khan (2013) jailbreaks, have previously seen hundreds escape with the help of weapons and explosives. Within that same timeframe, the authorities also thwarted an attempt to break into Adyala Jail (2012). The 2024 Rawalakot uprising, which saw inmates overpower guards and negotiate for their freedom, is, therefore, just the latest in a long series of such incidents.

Jailbreaks have also led to tragedy: a chaotic police raid to free ten judges held hostage by prisoners at the Sialkot district jail in July 2003 ended with three civil judges and five prisoners dead and another two judges critically wounded. Armed prisoners, serving time for kidnapping and robbery, had seized the judges during a routine inspection, demanding their freedom in a scene reminiscent of a Hollywood heist gone wrong. The botched rescue operation only served to acme the glaring dangers within Pakistan's prison system.

Earlier, in March 1986, around 50 gunmen stormed Sukkur's central jail, freeing 35 death-row inmates during a chaotic assault. They overpowered the wardens, cut electric wires and scaled walls to liberate prisoners condemned for murder and major robberies. Amid the mayhem, the wardens shot a fleeing prisoner, and a retired jail official was fatally shot after wounding several gunmen. Several wardens, including the superintendent, were critically injured. In a rare display of efficiency, five prisoners who refused to escape, perhaps hoping for a reward, were promptly hanged instead.

Even routine tasks have been used as escape opportunities. A prime example is Rashid Rauf, a suspected militant linked to the 2006 transatlantic aircraft plot, who dramatically escaped in 2007 while being escorted in Islamabad. Corruption is a popular means for facilitating escapes, as illustrated by the 2003 Hyderabad Central Prison break, which was enabled by bribed officials.

Ransom or political deals also come into play, with prisoners mysteriously obtaining ‘temporary’ releases, only to vanish into thin air.

Our prison system is perhaps the most dilapidated among the country’s many decaying institutions. Its 116 so-called functioning prisons, originally designed for 55,550 inmates, now cram in 83,701 souls, with 55,907 still under trial. That’s roughly 51% over capacity, with about 67% of inmates languishing without a conviction. It’s a marvel of inefficiency, showcasing our commitment to overcrowding and prolonged judicial indecision.

Unlike the rest of the world, where prisons fall under law and justice ministries, here they are operated by the executive branch, under the home department. Until recently, anyone could helm the mess, but in a rare stroke of sanity, officers are now appointed from the prison cadre only. It’s as if we suddenly realized that some semblance of expertise might be useful in running a prison

The prison system is a relic of the colonial era. It is governed by the outdated Pakistan Prisons Act of 1894 and the equally obsolete Management of Prisoners Act of 1900, along with the Bombay Jail Manual of 1908. Even though the Pakistan Prisons Rules were updated in 1978 and Sindh introduced the Prisons and Correction Service Act in 2019, the system continues to struggle with severe overcrowding, substandard infrastructure, meagre logistics, lack of proper training, and rampant corruption.

Despite the numerous high-profile jailbreaks, no lessons seem to have been learned, and we seem doomed to witness more chaos. The prison system remains a breeding ground for crime rather than a place for reform. A visit to any jail reveals a nightmare: habitual criminals, first-time offenders, convicts, and undertrials are all thrown together without any classification.

It’s a muddled mess. Despite sporadic efforts at the provincial level to update prison rules, torture and abuse by staff remain widespread, with prisoners’ rights to legal representation and humane treatment often ignored. Wealthy inmates can bribe their way to better healthcare while the poor suffer. Rehabilitation is an afterthought, with the system more focused on punishment than reintegration.



Overall, Pakistani authorities tend to rely on a combination of enhanced security, investigations, and manhunts rather than broader reforms in response to major jailbreak incidents. Nevertheless, the persistent threat of such incidents highlights the need for more comprehensive and sustained efforts to address the underlying vulnerabilities in the country's prison system. Part of the disorientation is because coordination between prisons and other components of the law enforcement apparatus is non-existent. Without serious intervention, all we will be left with is fortified cells for the powerful and open doors for the cunning.

The continued saga of jailbreaks in Pakistan is a reminder of the urgent need for systemic reform. At the level of institutional leadership, the cycle of suspension, replacement, and inaction must be broken. Real, meaningful changes should be introduced to transform prisons from breeding grounds for criminal activity into institutions of rehabilitation and reform. The authorities must also prioritize updating the archaic laws and rules governing prisons, enhance coordination among law enforcement agencies, and commit to rational accountability. It is only through a sustained and comprehensive effort that the deep-rooted issues within the prison system can be addressed and further chaos and tragedy prevented from happening again.

**SOURCE: WENEWS ENGLISH.PK, JULY 10, 2024**

# 'TTP now largest terror group in Afghanistan'

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- **UN monitoring report says banned outfit enjoys backing of Taliban regime, support from Al Qaeda**
- **Backs Islamabad's assertions Afghans being used to launch attacks in Pakistan, Nato weaponry in TTP hands**
- **Voices concern over IS-K elements being 'strategically' pushed into Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia**

KARACHI: The proscribed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is now the largest terrorist group in Afghanistan, enjoying operational and logistical support from both the Afghan Taliban and factions of the Al Qaeda terrorist network, according to a United Nations monitoring report.

"The Taliban do not conceive of TTP as a terrorist group: the bonds are close, and the debt owed to TTP significant," states the 15th report of the ISIL (Daesh) and Al-Qaeda/Taliban Monitoring Team, submitted to the UN Security Council.

Estimating its strength at around 6,000-6,500 fighters, the report notes that TTP is now the largest among the two dozen or so such groups that enjoy freedom to manoeuvre, under the oversight of the Taliban regime.

This lends credence to Islamabad's stance that Kabul is unwilling to act against Pakistan-facing terrorist groups, something officials such as Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi have reiterated time and again.

The report notes that TTP "continues to operate at significant scale in Afghanistan and to conduct terrorist operations into Pakistan from there, often utilising Afghans".

"TTP has intensified attacks against Pakistan, significantly increasing from 573 in 2021 to 715 in 2022 and 1,210 in 2023, with the trend continuing into 2024," the report, updated until May 28, states.

This also lines up with Islamabad's claims of the involvement of Afghan nationals in a number of recent terrorist attacks, such as the Bisham bombing, which claimed the lives of five Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver. The report also mentions this particular incident.

It also backs Pakistan's worry that Nato-calibre weapons, especially night vision capability, have been provided to TTP since the Taliban takeover, adding lethality to terrorist attacks against Pakistani border posts.

### **Al Qaeda support**

The report also questioned the Afghan Taliban's willingness to mitigate the TTP threat to Pakistan, given their historic ties, and describes the Taliban's "ad hoc support to, and tolerance of, TTP operations", which even includes the supply of weapons and permission for training and support from Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).

"AQIS assists TTP in conducting terrorist attacks inside Pakistan, with Tehreek-i Jihad Pakistan (TJP) claiming responsibility so as to relieve pressure on the de facto [Afghan] authorities."

Recalling the Sept 2023 clash between the Pakistani military and Afghan fighters – what the report termed the "largest TTP attack" of the past year – it said that when a large number of fighters launched a coordinated attack against two military posts in north-western Chitral, they were aided by a sizeable contingent from Al Qaeda.

Noting that Al Qaeda cells are operating in multiple Afghan provinces, mainly in the south-east, the report states most facilities associated with the group are mainly meant to train local fighters along with TTP operatives.

Al Qaeda's support to TTP includes "sharing of Afghan fighters for its tashkils (in this context, military staffing or a formation) and training camps in Afghanistan. Training provided by AQIS has resulted in TTP shifting tactics and high profile attacks against hard targets".

### **IS-K**

IS-K, which has recently expanded its outreach to Russia, claiming a couple of daring attacks, features prominently in the UN report, which notes the Afghan Taliban's success against this threat, also highlights glaring gaps.

IS-K and its affiliates in the region are estimated to have around 4,000 to 6,000 fighters, while others assess the core strength at 2,000-3,500. They have reportedly infiltrated the main ministries of interior, defence and intelligence while also seeking to covertly embed members in other groups such as TTP.

While acknowledging Kabul's claim that its operations had pushed key IS-K personnel across its borders, the report voiced concern over the impact this displacement would have on the security situation in Pakistan, Iran and other Central Asian states.

In response to the "high attrition rates" of its fighters, the report notes how IS-K has limited its presence in Afghanistan and expanded its external operations, "with skilled operatives and suicide bombers encouraged to travel to Europe, the Russian Federation and other neighbouring countries."

Describing their operations as "tactical rather than strategic", the report notes that the Taliban's counter-terrorism capabilities are deficient to meet the nature of that threat.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 12, 2024**

## Same old script

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WHEN it comes to the troubling issue of enforced disappearances/ missing persons – either Baloch or belonging to other ethnic/ religious groups, or political parties out of favour with the powers that be – the state clings to the same tired script. It either denies the problem exists, or comes up with unconvincing alibis to explain what may have happened to the missing individuals. When the heirs of the missing come out on the streets, the state either ignores them, or unleashes its wrath on the protesters. The latter course was adopted when police clashed with supporters of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee in Quetta on Thursday. BYC supporters had been protesting in the provincial capital's Sariab area for over a week, seeking the whereabouts of Zaheer Zeb Baloch and other missing persons. When their pleas failed to capture the state's attention, the activists decided to march to the city's Red Zone. They were met with tear gas and baton charges, while a number of them, including women, were arrested. BYC head Dr Mahrang Baloch said two of the injured people were in critical condition.

This unpleasant episode mirrors the 'welcome' Baloch marchers received upon their arrival in the federal capital in December last year; Islamabad Police meted out similarly brutal treatment to the demonstrators, among whom were women and children. Then too they were protesting for the same reasons. It is unfortunate that the state does not want to learn from these negative experiences. Firstly, as this paper has repeatedly said, if the state believes any individual has been involved in wrongdoing, they must be brought before a court of law, and their constitutionally guaranteed rights respected. Secondly, if the government continues to wield a big stick against peaceful protesters, instead of addressing their legitimate demands, the gulf between the rulers and the ruled will continue to widen, creating major obstacles in the path of national cohesion.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 13, 2024**



# Journalist shot dead in Nowshera

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PESHAWAR: A journalist from Peshawar was shot dead by unknown assailants in the Akbarpura area of Nowshera district, police said.

According to the FIR lodged by Anwar Zeb at the Akbarpura police station, he and his brother Hassan Zeb were on their way in a car when unidentified motorcyclists opened fire at his brother.

Anwar Zeb told the police he escaped unhurt in the attack but his brother died on the spot.

Police started investigation into the attack after registering the case against unknown persons.

Hassan Zeb, 40, was associated with the Peshawar-based Urdu daily Aaj and was a member of the Khyber Union of Journalists and Peshawar Press Club (PPC). He covered health and city beats.

The Khyber Union of Journalists announced a protest demonstration outside the PPC for Monday (today).

Meanwhile, KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur and Governor Faisal Karim Kundi condemned the killing of the journalist.

CM Gandapur sought a report of the incident and issued directives for an immediate arrest of the culprits behind the attack.

On June 18, journalist Khalil Jibran was gunned down in Landi Kotal.

On May 21, a citizen journalist, Kamran Dawar, was shot dead by unidentified attackers in Miram-shah. Police said that Mr Dawar was on his way home in Tappi village when he came under attack. Mr Dawar succumbed to injuries while being shifted to hospital.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 15, 2024**

# Surveillance central

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FARIEHA AZIZ

THE Islamabad High Court (IHC) order in the audio leaks case has been challenged by the government in the Supreme Court and an SRO authorising the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) to surveil citizens on the vague pretext of national security has been issued by the government. This SRO has already been challenged before the Lahore and Islamabad high courts.

Seemingly, the SRO is a reaction to the IHC's inquiry into the lawfulness of surveillance and whether any entity was authorised by law to intercept communication. The answer was a resounding no, so the government thought the fix to this would be to 'legalise' what was already being done in practice, post facto.

The SRO states: "The federal government in the interest of national security and in the apprehension of any offence, is pleased to authorise the officers not below the rank of grade 18 to be nominated from time to time by the Inter-Services Intelligence to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any telecommunications system as envisaged under Section 54 of the Act."

The Act referred to here is the Pakistan Telecommunication (Reorganisation) Act, 1996. The authorisation, given under Section 54(1) reads as follows: "54. National Security – (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time being in force, in the interest of national security or in the apprehension of any offence, the Federal Government may authorise any person or persons to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any telecommunication system."

This make-it-up-on-the-go modus operandi is a consistent feature. If the legality of a prevailing practice is called into question, issue an SRO, pass a law. Make it 'legal' if it isn't. But does it make it legal?

The Investigation for Fair Trial Act 2013 (IFTA'13) subjects all surveillance to warrants. The application for a warrant has to be filed by an applicant who is defined under IFTA'13 as the directorate general of the ISI. The authorised officer is defined as an officer, "not below the rank of BPS-20" whereas the SRO authorises an 18-grade officer to be nominated by the agency.

Now the IHC order establishes that no warrant for surveillance has been sought in 11 years of the law's existence. Issuing an SRO does not explain or account for a violation of existing law for over a decade while the practice of surveilling citizens has persisted in violation of it. But what of the practice that has persisted all these years, absent this authorisation? And can such an SRO supersede IFTA'13?

Legal questions aside, which will now be settled in court, there have been varying reactions to the SRO. One view holds it to be blatantly unconstitutional, unlawful, overbroad, discretionary giving unbridled powers, whereas the other sees the SRO as a step towards transparency and accountability, that the government has been forced to put something on record, and now it will be known who is doing it, pinning responsibility paving the way for accountability. But how? How do you hold an intelligence agency that operates under the executive on paper but figures over and above it in reality, accountable through an SRO? Over the years, there have been attempts to bring it into the accountability framework under the civilian ambit, but these have not seen the light of day.

To the extent of having something on paper and invoking its existence is one thing. But what meaning do legal structures have absent a rule-of-law regime, in which executive overreach and lack of accountability is the norm? Today's Pakistan is akin to a Kafka-esque reality where supposedly a Constitution exists and there are laws and courts; but despite it all, people disappear and are jailed on whims; the process is punishment, and there are no guarantees vis-à-vis life, liberty or dignity. Abuse of power and political victimisation are widespread. The law and Constitution serve no protection before or after an incident in a meaningful manner affecting the day-to-day lives of citizens. The SRO then is an announcement by the executive that rather than scaling back its excesses, they will only be codified further into the letter of executive notifications and laws.

National security cannot be an umbrella phrase simply thrown around, unqualified or accepted at face value. Who are the four million being surveilled under Lawful Interception Management System? Based on what criteria? When it comes to surveillance and methods of interception, the invasiveness of the tech tools matters.

Surveillance today is far more intrusive. Monitoring of voice conversations between two people earlier through a landline or now on the open line is very different today in the age of the internet and smartphones. How is a WhatsApp call being intercepted? If not through the telecommunications network since it is end-to-end encrypted, is it by infecting the device? Through what methods? Where is the sanction for it? Once there is intrusion into a device, everyone communicating with the person becomes a subject of surveillance. What of journalists and their sources? Lawyers and their engagement with clients – particularly those trying to escape unlawful abductions and arrests? Smartphones contain an individual's entire digital footprint. They are a repository of someone's whole life – personal and professional.

Article 14 is an inviolable right. An intrusion into someone's device is an intrusion into their home and a violation of their dignity. Can such broad-based intrusion be considered legitimate or lawful by any measure? In an environment where information is extracted for the purpose of blackmailing, there needs to be scrutiny first of the excesses of the executive rather than justifications that someone must do it or that it must be done.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 15, 2024**

# Drug fog

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THE country has an old drug problem. While the menace has raged across divides of class and gender, successive rulers have failed to clear its fatal fog. Recently, the CIA busted an international drug trafficking ring in Lahore; it supplied illegal substances to the youth including those in educational institutions in Punjab and smuggled hard drugs out of the country. The agency claims to have recovered “the largest-ever quantity of cocaine”. But the raid is far from a first: in May, the Lahore police’s Organised Crime Unit caught the Jordan Gang, another ‘international’ network selling designer and party drugs to upper-crust youngsters. The provincial police head stated in April that the force conducted over 300 raids in a day and made 125 arrests. Despite the scale at which these drug mafias operate, and the narcotics seized in drug hauls, the authorities expect to succeed without fixing the cause. An SSDO report in May revealed that conviction rates under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (1997) fell drastically: from 16pc in 2022, it sank to 2pc in 2023 in Punjab.

Additionally, the decline shows that grave flaws in the investigation and trial procedures have only helped culprits evade stipulated penalties. This means that little will change unless the criminal justice system undergoes extensive reforms. With news about police officers – 234 were mentioned in a report in March – being embroiled in the drug trade, it is obvious that neither the police-narcotic cartel nexus nor political patronage of the abhorrent market can be allowed to persist. The government must prioritise investing in the security force with manpower, financial incentives and modern equipment, otherwise crackdowns will remain futile. Social and environmental forces fuel drug abuse among frustrated youth; tackling a mental health crisis is critical for successful substance abuse prevention. It is not advisable to humiliate the young with drug tests in educational facilities. Instead, the state should fight the curse with sensitivity.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 15, 2024**

## 2 soldiers, 5 civilians martyred in terror attack on Dera Ismail Khan health centre

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**Two soldiers and five civilians were martyred in a terrorist attack on a rural health centre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, the military's media wing said.**

A statement from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that between the night of Monday and Tuesday, terrorists "carried out a cowardly attack" on a rural health centre in the district's Kirri Shamoza area and opened indiscriminate fire on staff.

"Resultantly, five innocent civilians, including two lady health Workers, two children and one watchman embraced martyrdom.

"Security forces in vicinity were immediately mobilised for clearance operation in rural health centre and in ensuing fire exchange, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists as a result of which three terrorists were sent to hell," the ISPR said.

It added that 44-year-old Naib Subedar Muhammad Farooq, a resident of Narowal district, and 23-year-old Sepoy Muhammad Javed Iqbal, a resident of Khanewal district, were martyred during the intense exchange of fire.

“Sanitisation of area is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area. The perpetrators of this heinous and cowardly act targeting innocent civilians, especially women and children, will be brought to justice.” the ISPR said.

The funeral prayers of the two soldiers were later offered.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned the incident.



8 security officials martyred in suicide blast targeting Bannu Cantonment, 10 terrorists killed

Earlier, the ISPR said that a terrorist attack targeting Bannu Cantonment martyred eight members of the security forces while a retaliatory operation killed 10 terrorists.

According to a press release issued today, an attempt by 10 terrorists to enter Bannu Cantonment in the early hours of Monday was “effectively thwarted” by security forces personnel, “which forced the terrorists to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into perimeter wall of the cantonment.”

Resultantly, the suicide blast caused a portion of a wall to collapse and damaged infrastructure, resulting in the martyrdom of eight security forces, it said.

The martyrs were identified as Naib Subedar Muhammad Shehzad, 44; Havildar Zil-e-Hussain, 39; Havildar Shahzad Ahmed, 28; Sepoy Ashfaq Hussain Khan, 30; Sepoy Sobhan Majeed, 22; Sepoy Imtiaz Khan, 30; Sepoy Arsalan Aslam, 26, belonging to the Pakistan Army as well as Lance Naik Sabz Ali, 34, of the Frontier Constabulary.

“In the ensuing operation, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists as a result of which all ten terrorists were sent to hell,” the statement said.

“This timely and effective response by the security forces prevented major catastrophe, saving precious innocent lives.

“The gallant and selfless action of the security forces is a testament of unrelenting resolve in fight against terrorism.”



The ISPR statement attributed the “heinous act of terrorism” to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, “which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well.”

Pakistan has consistently raised its concerns with the interim Afghan Government, asking it to deny persistent use of Afghan soil by the terrorists and take effective action against such elements, the statement read.

“Pakistan armed forces will keep defending the motherland and its people against this menace of terrorism and will take all necessary measures as deemed appropriate against these threats emanating from Afghanistan.”

The funeral prayers of the martyrs were offered.



A day ago, officials told Dawn that militants stormed a check post adjacent to a supply depot, adding that bombers hit the boundary wall of the cantonment near the depot in their attempt to force their entry but security forces besieged them.

“Two suicide bombers attacked the check post initially and then a few others managed to enter, but they were besieged,” the officials said.

They stated that security personnel were fully alert and engaged the militants foiling the attack with a timely response, adding that soldiers fought bravely.

A police official said they increased patrolling in urban and rural localities of Bannu district after the explosion, adding that roads leading to the cantonment were sealed as part of measures to avert any loss to citizens during the exchange of fire between security forces and militants.

Locals said the magnitude of the blast could be judged by the fact that it was heard far and wide in the area. A resident said he heard the explosion in Domel town, some 15 kilometres from Bannu



city. They said they saw black smoke billowing above the site and also heard gunshots in the cantonment area.

The residents said the blast caused damage to nearby houses and shops, smashed windowpanes and blew up shutters of outlets.

President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the terrorist attack, paying homage to the martyrs.

The president said that the security forces acted on time and saved the country from a “major disaster”, adding that the nation was proud of their efforts.

He paid tribute to the forces for successfully deterring a terrorist attack in Bannu and called for the complete annihilation of the terrorist elements.

President Zardari prayed for the deceased and expressed condolences to the bereaved families.



Separately, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also paid tribute to the security forces for foiling the terrorist attack.

He paid homage to the martyred army and frontier constabulary personnel and prayed for the families of the martyrs.

“The whole nation stands with security forces in the fight against terrorism,” he said.

“We are determined to end the menace of terrorism,” he added.

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وزیراعظم آفس  
 (پریس ونک)

اسلام آباد: 16 جولائی 2024

وزیراعظم کا بنوں جھاؤنی پر ایک بڑا دہشت گرد حملہ ناکام بننے پر  
 سیکورٹی فورسز کو خراج تحسین

وزیراعظم کا دہشت گردوں کا بہادری سے مقابلہ کرتے ہوئے دس دہشت گردوں  
 ...کو جہنم واصل کرنے پر سیکورٹی فورسز کی کارکردگی



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وزیراعظم کا شہداء کے خاندانوں سے اظہار تعزیت

دہشت گردی کے خلاف پاک فوج اور دیگر سیکورٹی فورسز کی  
 قربانیاں لازوال ہیں: وزیراعظم

پوری قوم دہشت گردی کے خلاف جنگ میں سیکورٹی فورسز کے  
 ساتھ کھڑی ہے: وزیراعظم

ہم حملے میں شہید ہونے والے سیکورٹی فورسز کے بہادر اور جری  
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Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in the past year, especially in KP and Balochistan after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

According to an annual security report issued by the Centre for Research and Security Studies, Pakistan witnessed 1,524 violence-related fatalities and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations in 2023 – marking a record six-year high.

KP and Balochistan were the primary centres of violence, accounting for over 90 per cent of all fatalities and 84pc of attacks, including incidents of terrorism and security forces operations.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 16, 2024

## 7 Pakistanis among 100 executed by Saudi Arabia in 2024

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Saudi Arabia executed two people convicted of drug trafficking, the interior ministry said, bringing the total number of executions carried out this year to at least 106, according to an AFP tally.

The official Saudi Press Agency reported the ministry's announcement, saying one was a Saudi national executed for trafficking amphetamines and the other a Pakistani for trafficking heroin, both in Makkah.

Saudi authorities resumed executions for drug-related offences at the end of 2022 after a hiatus of nearly three years.

Seven of the 106 executions recorded this year have been for drug-related offences, according to the AFP tally, based on official data.

In 2023, the authorities executed at least 170 people, including 33 accused of terrorism-related crimes.

At this point last year, the Gulf kingdom had executed at least 74 people.

On Monday, the Berlin-based European-Saudi Organisation for Human Rights condemned Saudi Arabia for carrying out "one execution almost every two days". "One hundred executions in 196 days demonstrates the Saudi government's insistence on using the death penalty extensively, in violation of international laws and its official commitments," it said in a statement.

Those executed this year include 78 Saudis, eight Yemenis, five Ethiopians, seven Pakistanis, three Syrians and one individual each from Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Jordan, India and Sudan, according to the rights organisation and AFP's tally. Two of them were women.

Saudi Arabia had executed more people in 2023 than any other country besides China and Iran, Amnesty International said in its annual report on the death penalty for that year.

The kingdom, notorious for beheadings, drew a wave of condemnation from around the world when it executed 81 people in a single day in March 2022.

The authorities deem the executions to be compatible with Sharia law and necessary to "maintain public order". De facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is seeking to transform the image of the world's biggest crude oil exporter in a bid to draw in tourists and investors.

Yet activists say the kingdom's continued embrace of capital punishment undermines the image of a more open, tolerant society that is central to Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 reform agenda.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 18, 2024

# Misplaced priorities

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TROUBLE is brewing in KP, where terrorist outfits are growing ever more emboldened in their attacks. This week, two outrageous assaults on a cantonment and a rural health centre in Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan, respectively, claimed the lives of 15 Pakistanis, including 10 soldiers, in the latest escalation by TTP-backed militants, who are believed to be operating from safe havens in Afghanistan.

Though Islamabad has issued a ‘strong demarche’ to Afghan representatives, demanding “immediate, robust and effective action” over the attack on the Bannu cantonment, it has been clear for a while that the de facto government in Kabul is failing to rein in the TTP, which is now the “largest terror group” operating on its soil, according to a recent UN report. It is imperative, therefore, for the Pakistani state to act against these terrorists and their facilitators. However, its plans have so far been frustrated by the state’s poor strategising.

About two weeks ago, the government had floated a proposal for an all-parties conference to discuss Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, which had been welcomed by the opposition parties, including the PTI. However, after the early enthusiasm, there has been no development on this front, and it is feared that the initiative may be delayed indefinitely due to the breakout of fresh hostilities between the PTI and the current regime.

This is dangerous from a national security perspective, as plans for combating a major existential threat have inadvertently become subservient to the seemingly never-ending political tussle. The state must keep in mind that it is not just the PTI, but several mainstream parties that have serious concerns about the proposed operation, and it is vital to get them on board before the state launches kinetic operations. Not doing so risks provoking the citizens residing in these areas, which may create unnecessary complications.

Consider, for example, that the first reaction from Bannu residents to the assault was to issue a statement that, among other things, made it clear they would not evacuate the area in case of a military operation. Locals said they would rather stand up and fight the terrorists themselves than abandon their homes for another antiterrorism drive. They recognise the problem, but they have no interest in the solution being proposed by the state. This is mainly a political failure, arising from the government’s inability to manufacture broad-based consensus around the need for a military operation.

There is an urgent need for this failure to be rectified. Too many lives are being lost to an enemy that is growing in strength the longer the infighting continues in the corridors of power. The government must call its APC at the earliest and invite all stakeholders to take part. This matter cannot be delayed further.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 19, 2024

## 3 terrorists killed during infiltration attempt at Pak-Afghan border in KP's Dir

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Three terrorists were killed by security forces during an infiltration attempt at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dir district, the military's media wing said.

A statement from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the movement of three terrorists was detected by security forces in the district on the night between Sunday and Monday.

"The infiltrators were surrounded, effectively engaged and after an intense fire exchange, all three terrorists were sent to hell," the ISPR said.

It said Pakistan was consistently asking the interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on its side of the border, adding that the neighbour was expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for perpetrating acts of terrorism against the country.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined and remain committed to securing its borders and eliminating the menace of terrorism from the country."

The Pakistan Army previously said that 29 terrorists were killed in a series of operations along the Pak-Afghan border in May, amid a surge in terrorism originating from Afghan soil.

The ISPR had noted a surge in attempts by Afghanistan-based terrorists to infiltrate the border and carry out attacks on the Pakistani side.

Last week, an attempt by 10 terrorists to enter Bannu Cantonment in the early hours of Monday was "effectively thwarted" by security forces personnel, "which forced the terrorists to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into perimeter wall of the cantonment."

The ISPR had attributed the "heinous act of terrorism" to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, "which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well."

According to a Foreign Office statement, the deputy head of mission of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Islamabad was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deliver Pakistan's strong demarche over the deadly terrorist attack.

The interim Afghan government was urged to fully investigate and take immediate, robust and effective action against the perpetrators of the Bannu attack and to prevent the recurrence of such attacks.

Relations between the two neighbouring countries have lately become strained, largely because of the banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group but also due to frequent border skirmishes. Last month, the Afghan defence ministry's spokesman angrily reacted to Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's remarks when he said that Islamabad could hit TTP hideouts in Afghanistan.

The military spokesperson said today regarding an alleged audio leak of the TTP chief that the group's actions would be "taken to their logical end", adding that they "only strengthened our resolve that Azm-i-Istehkam was necessary" for the country's stability and security.

Leaders of the Afghanistan interim government held a meeting with Pakistani officials in Doha earlier this month in what was seen as an effort to ease tension following the announcement of a fresh operation against the TTP.

Zabihullah Mujahid, leader of the Taliban delegation at the Doha conference, had described his meeting with Pakistani diplomats as "good" and expressed the hope for developing "positive relations" with Pakistan.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 22, 2024**

# Reforming militants

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A MAJOR question confronting the state concerns those militants who have laid down their arms – euphemistically referred to as the ‘good’ Taliban. Ask the people of areas badly hit by militancy, and they want nothing to do with these individuals.

For example, at the recently concluded Bannu Amn Jirga, participants wanted the ‘good’ Taliban out of their area, while calling for an end to pickets set up and patrols by such fighters. This is a dilemma for the state: what to do with those who are willing to forgo violence? The matter is complicated, and a solution should be found by consulting the people’s representatives, security experts and academics.

By all means those terrorist ideologues and facilitators responsible for the killing of thousands of Pakistani civilians and security men over the years cannot be welcomed with open arms, and must face the courts. Similarly, militants – good or bad – cannot be allowed to roam around freely and create a parallel structure, even if they have surrendered to the state: only the government has the authority to maintain law and order across the country.

But the question of the thousands of foot soldiers, particularly child fighters groomed by terrorist groups and juveniles, is more complex. Pakistan is not alone in facing this dilemma; for example, around 40,000 wives and children of IS fighters are currently being held in a Syrian camp run by Kurdish armed groups, as in most cases their countries of origin refuse to take them back.

Instead of giving militants – who surrender to the state and promise to renounce violence – complete liberty, they can be put through deradicalisation programmes.

Such initiatives have been tried before, in Swat for instance, at centres run by the military as well as NGOs. Initially, hard-core militants should be separated from low-level cadres not involved in gratuitous violent activity, with the former punished as per the law.

The deradicalisation process should involve psychological help as well as education and vocational training, so that the reformed militants can contribute to society. Even after completion of the programme, security forces need to keep an eye on the erstwhile militants so that they do not ‘relapse’ and return to the path of terrorism.

Of course, this is not easy, and will require funds and consistent effort. Moreover, the successes and failures of previous deradicalisation programmes need to be scientifically analysed so that the same mistakes are not repeated.

Deradicalisation should be seen as one component of countering violent extremism, which is part of the revised National Action Plan. Along with religiously inspired militants, it can also be extended to Baloch fighters who wish to renounce violence, and reintegrate into society.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 24, 2024

# Upholding rights

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EVEN a perceived threat to civil rights and freedom of expression undermines democracy; it impedes the enforcement of laws and creates a trust deficit between the state and the people. Therefore, the arbitrary detention of HRCP chairman Asad Iqbal Butt by the police, apparently to keep him from participating in a protest against enforced disappearances, is being viewed as a bid to intimidate rights champions and regulate free speech. The truth is that the sanctity of rights bodies, such as the HRCP – – practically the only independent voice for the powerless – should be inviolable in a civilised environment.

The unfortunate incident shows that the state machinery needs a reminder: demonstrations and social justice movements strengthen democracy and institutions and ensure balance of power. Nothing can change the fact that citizens continue to disappear, without the option of due process. The criminal practice is an attack on constitutional freedoms – reason enough for political forces to agitate for the recovery of absent citizenry and its right to legal recourse. Only in an authoritarian state is the agony of families in search of loved ones overlooked, and Baloch youth are forced to live under the threat of being disappeared from educational facilities, homes and public spaces. The role of the judicial system has been disappointing: what prevents it from prosecuting those responsible for enforced disappearances? The fight for the ‘lost’ people of Pakistan is a battle for the country’s soul; it is losing generations to radicalisation engendered by conflict and stolen liberties. Every citizen deserves safety within the legal system and access to justice. Thus, it is high time collective trauma and disappearances came to a halt. The wrongdoers, irrespective of clout and rank, must be held accountable, while each missing person must be produced in a court of law. Besides, Balochistan’s discontent, and its people’s struggle for the missing, demands humane acknowledgement and remedy from the state.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 27, 2024**



# Forces kill 'close associate of Gul Bahadur' in North Waziristan

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PESHAWAR: Security forces claimed to have killed a close associate of terrorist commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur in an operation in North Waziristan.

A statement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said an intelligence-based operation was conducted on the reported presence of terrorists in the area.

Following an intense exchange of fire with security forces, one of the terrorists, whom the ISPR identified as Razzaq, was gunned down.

The deceased terrorist was the alleged facilitator of a suicide attack in North Waziristan in May where seven security personnel, including two officers, embraced martyrdom.

A group affiliated with Hafiz Gul Bahadur had claimed responsibility for the attack.

The ISPR added that Razzaq was also involved in the targeted killing of Malik Sher Muhammad, grandson of Faqir of Ippi, who was gunned down in his car along with his companions in January 2023.

A sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area, the ISPR said.

The killing of an alleged associate of Hafiz Gul Bahadur came days after Pakistan blamed the terrorist commander for the attack on the Bannu cantonment in which eight soldiers embraced martyrdom.

"The heinous act of terrorism has been undertaken by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well," the ISPR had said in a statement after the attack.

Hafiz Gul Bahadur was previously a government contractor and a "good Taliban-turned-militant leader" whose outfit is now the strongest militant group in North Waziristan.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 27, 2024

# Four terrorists killed in Tank operation

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**PESHAWAR: Security forces killed four militants in a joint intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Tank district, the military's media wing said.**

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that the operation was launched based on reports of militant presence in the area. An intense exchange of fire ensued between security forces and the militants, resulting in the deaths of four militants.

"After intense fire exchange, four terrorists were killed," the ISPR said, adding that weapons and ammunition were recovered from the deceased militants, who were involved in numerous attacks against security forces, as well as abductions and targeted killings of civilians.

It said that a sanitisation operation was underway to eliminate any remaining militants in the area.

On Friday, security forces reported the killing of a close associate of militant commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan. The ISPR stated that the operation was conducted based on the reported presence of militants, leading to an intense firefight. One militant, identified as Razzaq, was gunned down.

It said that Razzaq was alleged to have facilitated a suicide attack in North Waziristan in May, which resulted in the martyrdom of seven security personnel, including two officers.

A group affiliated with Hafiz Gul Bahadur claimed responsibility for the attack.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 28, 2024**

# Gun control

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GUNFIRE filled the rarefied air of Karachi's upmarket DHA on late Thursday night as a clash between two groups from the Bugti clan left five dead and two critically injured. A case was registered on behalf of the state, which the police believe, will convey "a strict message to both sides that such an act is not acceptable". It also prevents the groups from reaching a compromise. But the bloodbath was led by two tribal overlords: Fahad, a nephew of the late Baloch chieftain Nawab Akbar Bugti, and his cousin, Ali Haider. The question then is: can the state bell such powerful cats?

Although accompanied by much shock and outrage, the bloody episode is a case study in the dark side of privilege: the sociopolitical compulsions to accumulate weapons backfire. The rule for peace and safety is clear – guns do not curtail crime. Instead, they kill and have repeatedly failed society, especially the vulnerable. This country needs a culture that views weapons with disdain, an infrastructure that tracks firearms, makes gun use difficult and gets tough on gun-toting private security entourages and availability – in short, sweeping gun control procedures and elite compliance. It is absurd that possessing and brandishing illicit weapons is the preferred option to taking the legal course. The fact that the law enforcement is riddled with sycophants of feudal wealth and influence only ensures that little will change. For as long as unregulated cottage weapon industries, widespread trade and ownership of assault rifles and smuggling of vast caches of arms across the border flourish in this country, their spill-over effect will be felt by both the privileged and the poor. Finally, the powerful too have to extricate themselves from gun lobbies, make all firepower hard to acquire and less dangerous to use. At present, we are a most conducive venue for gun violence. This means more blood and tears.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 29, 2024**

## Five militants killed in separate operations across KP

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PESHAWAR: At least five militants were gunned down by security forces in separate actions in different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, whereas a police constable embraced martyrdom during an operation conducted by law enforcement agencies.

In a statement, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that security forces conducted a joint intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Mohmand district, in which three militants were killed.

The statement claimed that forces recovered a cache of arms, ammunition, and explosives during the operation. "However, during intense fire exchange, Constable Abrar Hussain, a resident of district Swabi, having fought gallantly, embraced martyrdom," the ISPR said.

In a separate operation in Dera Ismail Khan, a militant named Sifatullah alias Mullah Mansoor was killed while three others were injured, the military said.

The statement noted that Sifatullah was a wanted man, involved in numerous militant activities in the area and is said to have facilitated the suicide bombing in Daraban on Dec 12, 2023.

According to the statement, security forces also engaged militants in North Waziristan, where one militant was killed.

"Pakistan's security forces stand shoulder to shoulder with other law enforcement agencies to ensure peace and stability across Pakistan and such sacrifices of our brave men further strengthen our resolve," the statement read.

On Saturday, the military's media wing issued a statement which read that four militants were killed by security forces in a joint IBO carried out in Tank district. "After intense fire exchange, four terrorists were killed," the statement had said.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 30, 2024**