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# Proscription regime

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**FOR over two decades, Pakistan has been proscribing militant groups. But while this list of ‘banned’ groups has kept expanding, there has been little noticeable reduction in militant activity, apart from temporary periods of calm.**

Two fresh entries have been made to Nacta’s list of banned groups: the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, closely linked to the TTP, and the Baloch separatist Majeed Brigade. Moreover, the state has labelled the proscribed TTP as ‘Fitna al Khawarij’, a reference to the rebel group dating back to the early Islamic period. But beyond issuing notifications and using historical and religious terms to delegitimise terrorist groups, a deeper probe is needed to ascertain why the state’s proscription regime has failed to produce the desired results.

Religiously inspired armed groups are a product of the Zia-era Afghan ‘jihad’, while nationalist militants with a separatist bent, particularly in Balochistan, have been around for longer. While the sectarian terrorist group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi was banned in 2001 by the Musharraf regime, the general outlawed five militant groups en masse in January 2002. In the febrile post-9/11 geopolitical atmosphere, it was widely believed that the late strongman had acted to keep Pakistan on the right side of the Americans, who had issued the ‘with us or against us’ ultimatum to foreign states. Regardless of the motivation, some action was taken against jihadi and sectarian groups. Yet 22 years after the event, the list of proscribed outfits has ballooned from five or six to the current 81. The list is an eclectic mix of armed religious outfits, separatists, and NGOs. But again, the key questions are: why does the list keep on growing, and why does militancy continue?

It appears that the state has pursued a flawed approach towards banning groups. After the first round of proscription in 2002, many of the groups took on new names and continued with business as usual. In some cases, their funds were not frozen, and their key leaders remained free men. Even today, some sectarian groups continue to operate with freedom under different names.

To truly neutralise the militant threat, only representatives of the state – the military and civil armed forces – should be allowed to bear arms. Moreover, the masterminds and ideologues of terrorist groups need to be prosecuted legally, and all their sources of funding frozen. A complementary effort to neutralise groups promoting extremist ideologies is also required.

Furthermore, the root causes that attract many ordinary citizens to the terrorist cause – injustice, poverty, lack of opportunity – need to be addressed. After the 2002 proscription, this paper had written that the ban “should have a salutary effect on the law and order situation ... and lead to ... socioeconomic normality”. Twenty-two years later, we still await this elusive normality.

Source: DAWN, AUGUST 2, 2024

# Pending cases

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**WITH Pakistan's justice system now a regular feature of the news cycle, some of its inner weaknesses are also receiving more attention. It should be seen as a positive development that may help catalyse the resolution of some long-standing issues.**

For example, the Supreme Court has recently raised fresh concerns regarding frivolous, vexatious and speculative legislation amidst a growing backlog of pending cases stuck in the justice system, which have now crossed 2.2m. "Such litigation must be rooted out and strongly discouraged," Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah remarked, while hearing a case involving a property dispute. Before dismissing the suit, he proposed imposing financial costs on litigants who waste the court's time. If implemented widely and as proposed, this may prove a good step in a country where the law is often used as a mechanism for prolonging disputes instead of resolving them.

Unfortunately, there is currently no means of expeditiously "rooting out" cases that may be frivolous, vexatious or speculative, which is why the introduction of penalties may seem like the only solution. However, with recent developments in technology, it may be possible to develop AI-based tools that can help flag problematic cases based on their history. It seems worth pointing out that the judiciary has, in recent years, adopted several technological innovations like e-courts and the digitisation of court procedures and documents with the aim of reducing the case backlog.

Combining stricter penalties for filing frivolous cases with innovative, technology-assisted strategies may help clear the pile-up more quickly than expected. Meanwhile, the superior judiciary should also consider in-house workshops to help judges better identify situations where litigants may not be acting in good faith and encourage the enforcement of penalties consistently and across the board. A set of guidelines may prove helpful in this regard.

As the aphorism goes, justice delayed is justice denied. But ordinary people who get caught up in court cases are not only deprived of timely justice, they are also forced to undergo immense emotional and financial stress throughout the litigation process. This is why a holistic and concerted approach to reducing the case backlog is necessary if the public's dwindling faith in the justice system is to be restored. Reconfiguring the system to dispense justice in more efficient ways will also have a positive impact on the economic milieu because investors cannot make business decisions in environments where disputes may not be settled for years.

Lastly, to limit the growing pendency of cases, the Supreme Court should also address the practice of seeking and giving adjournments on frivolous grounds. Costs and penalties should be imposed consistently on the responsible parties if proceedings are postponed for any reason other than the most unavoidable circumstances.

Source: DAWN, AUGUST 5, 2024

# Three security personnel martyred in Khyber

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KHYBER: At least three security personnel were martyred and a dozen others were injured in a series of militant attacks on several security posts in Khyber district.

The assaults took place as security forces attempted to intercept militants infiltrating the Rajgal Valley from Afghanistan.

Sources said this was the first time that the banned Gul Bahadur group and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pak-istan (TTP) jointly carried out attacks in the region, expanding their operations beyond their usual strongholds in Bannu, Lakki Mar-wat and Karak to the Khyber district.

Confirming the martyrdom of three soldiers, the military's media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), said that four militants were also killed.

ISPR identified the three soldiers, including Havildar Inam Gul, 37, resident of Mianwali district; Sepoy Muhammad Imran, 29, resident of Tank district; and Sepoy Iltaf Khan, 22, resident of Mardan district.

Local sources, however, put the death toll higher, with some accounts saying that up to six security men had laid down their lives on Friday.

The Prime Minister's Office said PM Shehbaz Sharif lauded the officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army for their "successful operation against terrorists" in the Tirah Valley.

The premier commended the military's efforts in cleansing Pakistan's soil of the menace of terrorism, describing it as a critical mission to rid the nation of extremist threats. He paid tribute to the soldiers who laid down their lives during the operation.

Friday's attacks came days after the government labelled the outlawed TTP as Fitna al Khawarij and proscribed two more outfits, Majeed Brigade and Gul Bahadur group, taking the total number of banned organisations to 81.

Local sources described an intense gun battle between security forces and militants, with heavy weaponry being used.

The Gul Bahadur group claimed responsibility for the assault on the Zangi check-post near Bagh Markaz in Tirah, marking their first major attack outside North Waziristan and Bannu. In a statement, the group also claimed to have destroyed an armoured personnel carrier (APC) and an excavator with a landmine planted on the road leading to the checkpost.

The claims could not be independently verified. Residents said they heard heavy gunfire but remained indoors due to safety concerns. Some artillery shells reportedly landed near private homes, but no casualties or property damage were reported.

Zarin Khan, a resident of the area, told Dawn by phone that Bagh Markaz, the local market, was open on Friday morning, with shops operating as usual and transport running normally. He observed no unusual movement of security forces despite the militant attack.

Residents in the region said that the crossfire continued for over three hours, leaving them terrified and confined to their homes until the firing ceased. Initially, the sound of intense gunfire was heard in the nearby mountains before reaching the Bagh Markaz area.

#### Bannu attacks

Meanwhile, a civilian lost his life and six others, including three police personnel, were injured in two separate militant attacks in Bannu district.

In one incident, a police patrol came under fire near the Nurar area within the Miryan police station's jurisdiction. The SHO of the police station, Khalid Khan, was among the injured.

A civilian, identified as Shakir Khan, was fatally shot and died on the spot. Two police officers – Sabir and Hasan – and two other civilians were also injured in the attack.

In a separate incident late Thursday night, a police constable was injured during an armed attack on a police post in the Kheraki Mamakhel area under the jurisdiction of the Haved police station. A police official said the assailants attacked the post with advanced weaponry, but the police responded quickly and effectively.

Constable Ajmal, who was injured in the exchange, was taken to the district headquarters hospital, where his condition was reported to be stable.

District Police Officer (DPO) Ziauddin Ahmed visited the post and praised the cops for their bravery in repelling the militants. He stated that the prompt and effective response of the police forced the assailants to retreat.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 10, 2024**

# Road to moderation

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THE country's top civilian and military authorities on Thursday pledged to crush extremism and militancy while addressing an Ulema and Mashaikh Conference. This is the latest salvo on this topic from the top brass in the wake of the Azm-i-Istehkam programme announced in June. While some of the comments at the event appeared to be aimed at political parties that have fallen foul of the powers that be, other remarks were squarely aimed at terrorist groups that have begun to reassert themselves. The prime minister called for efforts to wipe out the banned TTP, referred to as 'Fitna al Khawarij'. The army chief, meanwhile, said social media was being used to spread "anarchy", and cautioned against "corruption on earth", a theological term. He also asked the assembled preachers to shun extremism and help "bring back moderation" in society.

Considering the existential threat terrorism and extremism pose to Pakistan, there can be no disagreement with the crux of the message enunciated by the civilian and military leadership. Yet we must also remember that the state has been making such efforts, in one shape or another, for the past two decades and counting, with very modest success. In the post-9/11 era, Gen Musharraf pushed his ideology of 'enlightened moderation' to discourage extremist trends within the nation and the broader Muslim world. These efforts encountered a rude awakening when terrorism exploded nationally in the aftermath of 2007's Lal Masjid fiasco. In 2018, a state-backed fatwa was issued in the form of Paigham-i-Pakistan, which was reportedly endorsed by hundreds of clerics as it sought to formulate a theological response to the monster of terrorism. Yet today, our leaders are still stressing the need to wage the good fight against terrorism and extremism. An honest appraisal by the state, therefore, is in order to determine where we have gone wrong. Some obvious weaknesses in our counterterrorism approach appear to be lack of follow-up, and the state losing interest after the launch of CT campaigns. For example, the National Action Plan is a considerably thorough CT document; yet its enforcement has left much to be desired. Moreover, while violence by any party cannot be condoned, the state should not fuse the political opposition with hard-core militants and extremists that seek to overthrow the constitutional order. This misplaced conflation will only harm national CT efforts.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 10, 2024**

# UN panel hails accolade for Pakistan's human rights body

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- **Members question plans to repatriate foreign nationals**
- **Pakistan is fully aware of its responsibilities, meeting told**

ISLAMABAD: The UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination has praised Pakistan for the upgraded “A” status of its flagship human rights body. The remarks were made by Yeung Kam John Yeung Sik Yuen, the country rapporteur for Pakistan, during a meeting of the UN committee, which concluded its periodic review of the human rights situation in Pakistan.

Mr Yuen said the committee had received a report from the National Commission for Human Rights, informing that earlier this year it had been accredited with an “A” status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. He congratulated the commission on this success and said its efforts must be commended. However, he said, blasphemy laws were a matter of concern, adding the committee had received reports of persons belonging to minority groups being falsely accused of blasphemy or killed or physically attacked before trial.

He asked the Pakistani delegation, led by Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, about the number of extrajudicial killings after blasphemy accusations and what measures the government had taken to promptly investigate and prosecute such cases. The delegation informed the committee that to ensure justice in blasphemy cases, the investigation is led by a senior officer of a rank not lower than a superintendent. All police departments in Pakistan had formulated standard operating procedures for investigation into blasphemy cases so that no innocent people are framed, the delegation added.

## **Repatriation of Afghan nationals**

The co-rapporteur, Pela Boker-Wilson, talked about Pakistan's plans to repatriate illegal Afghan nationals in three phases. “What steps had been taken to ensure that the plan contains provisions for individualised assessments of risks of refoulement, including for Afghan women and children who were victims of trafficking or who may have a justifiable fear of persecution upon return?” she asked. Ms Boker-Wilson also sought clarification about reports that since the government started implementing the plan, an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 Afghan had returned daily.

The Pakistani delegation told the committee that the repatriation plan was not Afghan-specific as it aimed to identify and repatriate illegal foreigners in a phased manner. In addition to deportations, there were measures to repatriate individuals holding fraudulent documents, which applied to a large number of Afghans, the meeting was told.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 11, 2024**

## Security man martyred in North Waziristan, injured officer passes away



**Funeral prayers of Lt. Uzair Mehmood Malik Shaheed, who was martyred due to injuries suffered during a gun battle with terrorists in Khyber, are offered at the Peshawar Garrison on Aug 11**

- **President, PM pay tribute to Lt Uzair Malik**
- **SHO escapes blast, traffic cop survives attack**
- **Bodies of two missing FC personnel recovered**

PESHAWAR / ISLAMABAD: A security official embraced martyrdom and four others, including an officer, were injured during exchanges of fire with militants at two locations in North Waziristan, police sources said.

Meanwhile, a young army officer, Lt Uzair Mehmood Malik, who was critically wounded during an intense gun battle with militants in the Tirah Valley of Khyber district on Friday, passed away at Peshawar's Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on Sunday, where he was being treated. He was laid to rest at his native graveyard in Attock district.



The first incident in North Waziristan occurred in Razmak tehsil, where militants targeted a security official who later succumbed to his injuries. The second clash took place on Khaisur Road in Mir Ali tehsil, resulting in injuries to four security personnel. The wounded were shifted to Miramshah Hospital. The military's media wing didn't immediately issue a statement.

On the martyrdom of Lt Malik, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the army officer was leading troops at Bagh, one of the three locations in the Tirah Valley where security forces and militants exchanged fire on Friday.

The ISPR said Lt Malik fought bravely and killed four militants. "However, during an intense fire exchange, the officer got critically injured and was under treatment at CMH Peshawar. Today, he succumbed to injuries and embraced Shahadat," it said.

The ISPR said the security forces were determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country. "Such sacrifices of our brave officers and soldiers further strengthen our resolve," it added.

Lt Malik's funeral prayer was held in Peshawar, attended by his family, Peshawar's corps commander and other civil and military officials. He was laid to rest with full military honours in his hometown in Bhandar Tali village in Attock district's Jand tehsil.

#### President, PM pay tribute

President Asif Ali Zardari expressed deep sorrow over Lt Malik's martyrdom, offering condolences to his family and lauding his sacrifice in defending the nation. He reaffirmed the country's commitment to continuing operations against militants.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also paid tribute to the fallen officer and highlighted Lt Malik's role in eliminating four militants.

He said the nation stood shoulder to shoulder with the army in the war against militants. "Our martyrs and their families are the pride of the whole nation," he added.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also paid tribute to Lt Malik's bravery, noting his pivotal role in thwarting the militants' nefarious designs.

Mr Naqvi said the brave officers and soldiers of the security forces had made unforgettable sacrifices in the war against terrorism and stressed that the sacrifices of the martyrs would always be remembered.

#### Traffic constable injured

In Lakki Marwat district, a traffic policeman was injured when unknown armed motorcyclists opened fire at him in Serai Naurang town on Sunday.

The injured cop, Shahid Munir, was on his way home on his motorcycle after completing his duties at Manjiwala Chowk when two masked gunmen opened fire at him.

"During the attack, I lost control and fell into a canal along with my motorcycle. As the attackers approached, I managed to draw my pistol and fire back, forcing them to flee the scene," Mr Munir

recounted to journalists from his bed at the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, where he was said to be out of danger.

**FC officials bodies recovered**

Moreover, the Frontier Corps recovered the bodies of its two missing personnel on Saturday.

They were abducted by unknown armed men from Tiarza tehsil of Upper South Waziristan and found in the Kot Konr mountains.

Meanwhile, a police official, Additional SHO Khurshid, narrowly escaped an explosion followed by gunfire targeting his vehicle in the Angoor Adda area of Birmal tehsil in Lower South Waziristan on Sunday.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 12, 2024**

# Unfulfilled vision

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THE Quaid-i-Azam's speech to the Constituent Assembly on Aug 11, 1947, mere days before independence, was a clarion call against the dangers of communalism. Yet, like much of Mr Jinnah's vision, the governments that came after him did little to translate these lofty goals into reality. Today, as Pakistan celebrates Minorities' Day, an honest reckoning is in order to ascertain how and why the state has failed its non-Muslim citizens. Pakistan, as envisioned by its founding father, was to be a state where all communities could live in peace and thrive. Quite the opposite has occurred. While it can be argued that India took the same route after Partition, eventually shedding its secular skin and taking on the violent avatar of Hindutva, on this day we need to focus on where we went wrong.

The current year – like many years before it – has been a difficult one for Pakistan's minorities. For example, Ahmadis have seen mobs attack their places of worship, while members of this community have also been stopped from engaging in their rituals within their homes. The Christian community has also been targeted by mob violence, fuelled by dubious blasphemy allegations. An ugly bout of anti-Christian violence hit Sargodha in May, bringing back the painful memories of last year's rampage in Jaranwala.

Meanwhile, the state has been unable to end forced conversions and the kidnapping of Hindu girls and women. Much of this is the result of decades of steady radicalisation of society, and the unchecked power that violent extremist groups exercise. The state has, unfortunately, mostly remained a silent spectator as these groups have gained strength, and in some cases, has even used them for its 'strategic' ends. The rise of militancy and extremism, and the plight of minorities, are all interlinked, and have contributed to the culture of intolerance that has taken root in the country.

There may, however, still be time to reverse the tide. Ten years ago, in response to suo motu hearings, then chief justice of Pakistan, Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, issued a landmark verdict where the defence of minorities' rights is concerned. In it, Justice Jilani issued several orders which – if put into practice – could significantly aid the struggle for equal rights for Pakistan's non-Muslim citizens. These included a dedicated police force to protect non-Muslim worship places, controlling hate speech on social media, and forming a national council on minority rights.

Rights activists continue to demand that such an empowered and autonomous body be created to safeguard minority rights. In his Aug 11 speech, the Quaid reiterated that the government's "first duty" was to protect the "life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects". The state needs to do much more than it is at the moment to fulfil this duty.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 11, 2024**

## Panjgur DC killed in attack on Quetta-Karachi highway

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**Panjgur Deputy Commissioner Zakir Hussain Baloch.**

QUETTA: The Panjgur deputy commissioner was killed and four others injured in an attack on the Quetta-Karachi National Highway, near Mastung, according to officials.

DC Zakir Hussain Baloch was on his way to Quetta along with the Panjgur Municipal Committee chairman when unknown assailants opened fire on his official vehicle near Khadkocha, Mastung. According to security officials, at least 15 armed men had blocked the road and were checking vehicles passing through the area.

They also tried to stop the deputy commissioner's vehicle and opened fire when it sped away.

Two officials were seriously injured in the attack and shifted to the Shaheed Nawab Ghous Bakhsh Memorial Hospital in Mastung, where Mr Baloch succumbed to his injuries, according to the hospital's chief executive, Dr Saeed Ahmed.

The deceased was hit by bullets in the chest and stomach, which caused internal bleeding, resulting in his death, said Dr Ahmed.

The Panjgur Municipal Committee chairman, Abdul Malik Baloch, also received multiple bullet injuries and has been shifted to Quetta for treatment.

He is the younger brother of National Party Balochistan's chapter president Rehmat Baloch.

Security forces have launched a search operation in the area to arrest the attackers. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

Eight injured in grenade attack

In another attack, eight people, including a woman, were injured when a grenade exploded in Satellite Town, Quetta.

Officials said unknown armed men riding a motorcycle hurled the hand grenade at a police patrol vehicle in the Chalo-Barvri area.

The vehicle remained safe in the attack. The injured have been shifted to the Civil Hospital.

Another hand grenade attack was also reported in the city's Sariab area late on Monday. According to officials, unknown motorcyclists attacked the Government Girls College in Sariab Mills area. The explosion damaged the windowpanes of the college and nearby buildings.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 13, 2024**

# Rebuilding a dream

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**INDEPENDENCE Day celebrations today for millions of this country's citizens will be tempered by the harsh realities of life in modern Pakistan, foremost of which are economic stagnation, political polarisation and resurgent militancy and extremism.**

Though we have lurched from crisis to crisis ever since independence, in the current circumstances a pall of gloom hangs over the nation, with many – particularly the young – losing hope of living a dignified life in their homeland.

The ruling elite has done little of substance to dispel the clouds of doom; in fact, they are the key reason why nearly 240m people today see no light at the end of the tunnel. While we are told that the economy is on the mend, a large swathe of the population is struggling with high prices, and many are being pushed into poverty or basic subsistence.

On the political front, there seems to be no desire by any of the major players to achieve a grand concord for the sake of the nation. Extremist forces are also casting their dark shadow across this land, and threatening to devour the nation Jinnah built.

The reason we are in dire straits is that over the decades, we have been constantly moving further and further away from the vision of the founding fathers, particularly Quaid-i-Azam. If Providence were to allow him to witness the Pakistan of today, would the great man recognise the nation he struggled for? It is highly doubtful.

The Quaid left a blueprint for how the state should be run, and most successive rulers have done all in their power to ensure none of his directives were implemented. For example, he had spoken about democracy, constitutionalism, protecting minorities, eliminating corruption, etc. In each of these areas we have done the exact opposite. In his 1943 Eid message, he said that “grave political issues cannot be settled by the cult of the knife or by gangsterism. ... Nor can political views be altered by the threats of violence”. These prescient words sum up our current predicament.

Political forces are showing incredible rigidity, while the powers that be refuse to stay within the confines of their constitutional role. Respect for the vote has been trampled underfoot, while those who peacefully protest for their rights are dubbed as ‘terrorists’ and ‘troublemakers’. The only path to redemption lies in upholding the constitutional framework, and respecting the popular will. Jinnah was crystal clear about this, and it rings true now as it did then.

‘True’ independence – and not in the sense of a political slogan – can only be achieved when Pakistan’s children are assured of a better tomorrow, and the people of this country are freed from a stifling existence, and can achieve their full potential.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 14, 2024**

# Targeting TTP

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IF the priority being given to it by the security apparatus is any indication, terrorism seems to be metastasising rapidly into a major existential threat for Pakistan. Addressing the Azadi Parade at PMA Kakul on the eve of Independence Day celebrations, army chief Gen Asim Munir saw it necessary to utilise the occasion to reiterate his institution's resolve to wipe out, both physically and ideologically, the threat posed by the banned TTP. Asking Kabul to choose Islamabad over any obligations it felt it owed to the terrorist outfit, Gen Munir underlined that Pakistan desires good relations with Afghanistan, "its long-standing and brotherly neighbour to the east". Referring to terrorist groups as 'Fitna-al-Khawarij', a new label that has been introduced in recent days to officially refer to outfits involved in terrorist activities, Gen Munir said the country "does not consider them Pakistani" because they do not accept the Sharia or the Constitution. The army chief identified KP specifically as an area of concern for the authorities because the 'Fitna-al-Khawarij' has reared its head in that province.

There are many things to unpack from his statement. For starters, it is encouraging to note that the security establishment is clearly taking the TTP threat very seriously. Experts have pointed out that the banned group has been able to regroup and marshal its resources because the Pakistani authorities not too long ago were still hoping to 'rehabilitate' its hard-core militants and 'reintegrate' them into society. Now, the Pakistani state is once again attempting to tackle the TTP threat in what it believes is a more 'holistic' way, which includes giving it a new name. But is slapping on a new label on a hard-core terrorist outfit the right strategy, especially when the label in question is also imbued with religious meaning? The decision to mix faith and militancy is, after all, how this problem started. And will the state really be able to implement its new policy vis-à-vis the TTP without first addressing where it originally went wrong? It seems that unless the authorities are more open about their own role in the genesis of this problem, it will remain difficult for them to ensure clarity of purpose. The strong dissonance between past and present policies can only be resolved by adopting a single, clear stance.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 15, 2024**

## 7 terrorists killed during intelligence-based operation in KP's Kurram district, says military

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Seven terrorists were killed by security forces during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district, the military's media affairs wing said.

According to a press release issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the operation was conducted on the reported presence of terrorists in the area.

It said security forces effectively engaged terrorists of the Fitna Al Khawarij, formerly called the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and seven were killed while five were injured.

"Khawarij's hideout was also busted and a large quantity of weapons, ammunition & explosives was recovered," the ISPR said, adding that the slain terrorists were involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as innocent civilians.

"Sanitisation operation is being conducted to eliminate any other kharji (outcasts) found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," the statement added.

President Asif Ali Zardari appreciated the professionalism shown by the security forces for the successful operation and paid tribute to them.

According to a press release from the President House's media wing, Zardari reiterated the national commitment to eliminate terrorism from the country.

"The entire nation is with the security forces for the total eradication of terrorism," the president said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also commended the efforts and said that the entire country paid tribute to the officers who engaged in "performing their duties without caring for their lives for the integrity of Pakistan".

According to a post on state-run PTV's X account, the premier stated that the forces were working "day and night to cleanse" the country of Fitnah Al Khawarij.

"The entire nation stands by the side of the Pakistan Army in its determination to cleanse the soil of the homeland from the menace of terrorism," Shehbaz said.

Last week, an officer embraced martyrdom during an exchange of fire in the Tirah Valley's Bagh area of Khyber district.



Similarly, two soldiers and five civilians were martyred in a terrorist attack on a rural health centre in the Dera Ismail Khan district in July.

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, AUGUST 15, 2024**

# Pakistanis fast flying to greener pastures



**ISLAMABAD:** The Federal Ministry for Interior is going to have its hands full in the coming days as it struggles to meet the massive increase in the demand to print passports of citizens disillusioned by unemployment and the lack of opportunities.

As many as 7.3 million Pakistanis have left the country over the last 10 years for greener pastures.

According to a document, 6.2 million Pakistan's nationals migrated from the country during the PDM government, while 1.1 million green passport holders preferred to bid farewell during PTI's reign all in the hope for better employment opportunities.

Around 3.8 million Pakistanis left the country during the PML-N government from 2013 to 2018, followed by 2.08 million during the PDM government, 1.13 million during PTI government and 0.38 million during the incumbent PML-N regime.

The preferred destination of Pakistan's nationals during the PML-N and PDM government was Saudi Arabia as 2.9 million Pakistanis flew to the country. The second hotspot for Pakistani migrants was the UAE with 2.1 million, while 0.4 million went to Oman, 0.2 million to Qatar, 0.1 million to Malaysia, 31,839 to the UK, 4,000 to the USA and 3,861 to Japan.

In contrast, 0.62 million Pakistan's nationals settled in Saudi Arabia during the PTI government, 0.29 million in UAE, 74,000 in Oman, 64,000 in Qatar, 29,000 in Bahrain, 13,500 in Malaysia, 2,741 in UK and 1,309 in USA.

As per the document, over 350,000 highly qualified Pakistanis moved to foreign countries during the 10-year period in question. Of them, 300,000 left the country during the PML-N government, while 48,000 Pakistanis flew out for better prospects during the PTI tenure.

In terms of profession, as many as 24,500 doctors, 62,000 engineers, 13,000 teachers, 12,500 nurses, 53,000 accountants, 217,000 electricians, and 5,257 pharmacists settled in foreign countries over the last 10 years.

Source: **THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 16, 2024**

# Lasting damage

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**WHAT started off as a desperate attempt to choke public criticism of state institutions is now threatening to shake the very foundations of Pakistan's budding digital economy. This week, internet users experienced a higher-than-usual level of difficulty accessing internet services.**

As industry leaders sounded the alarm, warning that IT businesses were considering relocating, the government finally acknowledged that it has been updating its "web management system", its euphemism for a firewall meant to monitor Pakistanis' online activities. The admission came from the young IT and telecom minister, Shaza Fatima Khawaja. Thus far, her ministry had either feigned ignorance or not been truthful about the internet connectivity problems across the country, even attributing them to 'technical faults' on the end of various service providers.

While Ms Khawaja was pooh-poohing internet users' concerns about the effects of the firewall before a Senate committee, one of the world's largest platforms for freelancers had already begun labelling the accounts of Pakistani gig workers as 'unavailable'. Fiverr, which is popular with Pakistani workers offering their services in the global digital economy, said that it felt compelled to warn its clients that Pakistani freelancers' ability to complete projects on time may be affected by the internet disruptions they are facing.

This is nothing short of a major crisis. Pakistan is one of the biggest suppliers of labour to the global online workforce; the third largest, in fact, according to the University of Oxford's Online Labour Index. In a country where decent employment is difficult to come by, many young men and women have been selling their skills to foreign clients through the internet, netting a solid income for themselves and much-needed foreign exchange for the country.

Though Pakistani gig workers generally enjoy a positive reputation, their reliability is now in question. Both rights activists and experts kept pointing out that implementing a firewall and restricting internet services could have unforeseen consequences.

Armed with Maslow's hammer, the authorities refused to listen. Now, they may have imperilled the future of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of young workers by broadcasting to the world that Pakistanis in the gig economy cannot be relied upon because their government keeps interrupting their access to the internet on a whim. The long-term consequences of this policy could be devastating. If Pakistan continues to be seen as an unreliable partner in the global digital economy, it risks losing a significant source of foreign exchange and stifling the growth of its IT sector. The state should not allow itself to be so blinded by its desperation that it ends up setting the whole forest on fire just to smoke out a few mischief-makers. Such short-sighted policies may only push even more youth towards agitation against the state.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 17, 2024**

## Another 9/11 could 'originate from Afghanistan'

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**ISLAMABAD:** A top Pakistani diplomat handling Afghan diplomacy has sounded the alarm, cautioning that another 9/11-style attack could originate from Afghanistan, a war-torn country he says the world has all but forgotten.

"Afghanistan has almost been forgotten. There is no doubt about it and this was in fact highlighted during the Doha 3 session in June. Humanitarian assistance is not up to the mark. Even last year only one-third of the commitments were fulfilled," remarked Pakistan's special representative on Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Durrani during a talk at the Ambassadors' Lounge.

He said after the Ukraine war and Palestinian genocide, the priorities of the international players changed. "In fact, Afghanistan is no more in the news. Forget about front or back pages, even in the inner pages Afghanistan is absent."

"I think it can push back Afghanistan to pre-9/11 conditions and which in fact then give birth to 9/11," Durrani warned.

He said 97 per cent of the current Afghan population lives below the poverty line.

"Of which 52 per cent of the population is actually dependent on international humanitarian assistance," he added.

"And if the economic situation continues to deteriorate, I think our concern should be that people in Afghanistan would start leaving the country and their most favourite destination is Pakistan. This is something we should be sensitive about and the international community should know their responsibilities," he added.

The special envoy on Afghanistan also warned that the presence of different terrorist groups, including Daesh Khorasan, is a major challenge for the region and beyond.

"My worry is that ISKP is gaining ground inside Afghanistan and that should be a source of concern for everyone in the region and beyond because of their actions in Iran, their actions in Moscow and also many operations inside Pakistan. If that can happen here it can happen elsewhere."

"So it should be a concern for everyone."

The Afghan Taliban recently celebrated their three years in power.

When asked to give his assessment on the Taliban rule and their possible international acceptance, Durrani was of the view that they were moving in that direction.

"We should not forget that they are faced with tremendous challenges. Number 1, they are not recognised by any country, secondly, when they came to power, their coffers were empty, thirdly, they were not expecting of a meltdown of Ashraf Ghani government."

"On the balance, if you look at it during the past 3 years, I think the security situation in Afghanistan has improved, there is less corruption, which is internationally acknowledged," he further said.

Since coming to power, the Afghan Taliban have enforced strict rules, claiming to be in conformity with Islam. The Taliban regime, despite earlier promises, banned girls' education, something that greatly impacted their chances of getting international legitimacy.

Durrani said the Taliban's actions might suit their own conditions but those couldn't be called Islamic.

"The Afghan Taliban have also implemented certain rules and regulations which in fact may suit the Afghan conditions but certainly do not fit into the Islamic tenets which they claim they have implemented," he said.

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has only gone from bad to worse under the Taliban regime as they refused to neutralise the TTP threat.

"For Pakistan peace in Afghanistan is welcome, we have been telling this to the Taliban. But at the same time, our complaint is that their peace has become a problem for us because of the TTP. TTP attacks have increased by 70 per cent in Pakistan," Durrani said.

When asked about Pakistan's options to deal with TTP, Durrani was adamant that diplomacy was working. He was confident that Pakistan would resolve the TTP issue despite the Taliban's reluctance to take action against terrorist sanctuaries.

Source: **THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 19, 2024**

# Two soldiers, cop martyred in D.I. Khan, Lakki attacks

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**DERA ISMAIL KHAN/LAKKI MARWAT: Two soldiers were martyred and three others sustained injuries in an attack on a convoy of security forces in Kulachi tehsil of Dera Ismail Khan district, while a constable was martyred and three others were injured in an ambush on a police van in Lakki Marwat district.**

A police official said that militants attacked the convoy of security forces and elite force near Maddi area of Kulachi tehsil in the jurisdiction of Kulachi police station. As a result, two soldiers were martyred and others injured.

The martyred soldiers were identified as Hava-ldar Mohammad Shaukat and Sepoy Mohammad Imran, while the injured included Amjad, Ajmal and Jahanzeb.

Police and security forces along with Rescue 1122 teams reached the spot soon after receiving information about the incident. They shifted the martyred and injured soldiers to the Combined Militancy Hospital (CMH), D.I. Khan.

In Lakki Marwat, militants attacked a police van, claiming the life of a police constable. The SHO of Bargai police station and two other constables were injured when unknown on Sunday.

An official said the police party was on a patrolling duty in the remote rural locality, bordering the tribal region. The martyred constable was identified as Nisar Ahmad of the Frontier Reserve Police. SHO Shakir Khan and two other constables were also injured in the attack.

The official said a large contingent of police was dispatched to the area to launch a search for the shooters who fled the scene.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 19, 2024**



# Four security men martyred in Afghan border clashes

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**DERA ISMAIL KHAN / BAJAUR:** Three security personnel were martyred and five militants were killed in an exchange of fire along the Pak-Afghan border in Bajaur district while a Frontier Corps man was martyred in a clash with Afghan forces at the Gaznali border check post near the Noshki area of Balochistan.

A statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of Pakistan military, said that the security forces engaged a group of militants who was trying to infiltrate Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the Bajaur area.

The troops effectively engaged and thwarted the militants' attempt to infiltrate and an exchange of fire took place, the statement said.

The statement further said that five militants were killed in the clash on the Pak-Afghan border while four others were injured.

"However, during intense exchange of fire, three brave sons of soil: 36-year-old Naik Inayat Khan from district Khyber, 35-year-old Lance Naik Umer Hayat from district Mansehra and 25-year-old Sepoy Waqar Khan from district Peshawar, having fought gallantly, embraced Shahadat," the statement said.

It further said that Pakistan has consistently been asking the interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on its side of the border, adding that the interim Afghan government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of the Afghan soil by the militants for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan.

The statement said that Pakistani security forces are committed to securing its borders and such sacrifices of the brave soldiers further strengthen the security forces' resolve. In another incident in Dera Ismail Khan, sources said that the security forces killed four militants in an operation carried out in Krrri Malang area of Tehsil Kulachi on Monday.

The sources said that the operation was carried out on reported presence of militants in the area, adding that an exchange of fire took place between security forces and militants which left four militants killed.

They said that two of them were later identified as Irfan and Zeeshan.

Security forces also recovered a huge quantity of sophisticated weapons and hand grenades from possession of the militants who were killed in the operation, the sources said, adding that the militants killed by security forces were wanted in several cases including attacks on security personnel and bank vans.

No official statement was issued by ISPR on the exchange of fire in Dera Ismail Khan till filing of this report late in the night.

### **FC personnel martyred**

A security personnel of Frontier Corps was martyred in an armed clash with Afghan forces in Noshki area of Balochistan, Pakistani officials confirmed on Monday.

According to reports the armed clash took place between two sides on Sunday in Gaznali area, a locality on the Pak-Afghan border, some 200 km from Quetta.

“The Frontier Corps personnel and Afghan forces exchanged heavy fire at the border in Noshki area,” Noshki deputy commissioner Amjad Hussian Soomro said, adding that one personnel of Noshki militia, a wing of Frontier Corps, was martyred in the exchange of fire. However, he did not tell the reason for the clash.

However, a senior FC official requesting anonymity, said that Afghan forces opened fire on the FC personnel when they went to Gaznali check post after receiving reports about the damage of to the fence erected by Pakistan to check infiltration of militants and illegal Afghans into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

The Afghan forces opened fire on seeing the FC troops. The FC personnel returned fire, triggering a heavy exchange of fire which continued for an hour. The exchange of fire resulted in martyrdom of a Pakistani security personnel who was identified as Subedar Tariq who suffered bullets on his stomach.

There was no report of casualties on the Afghanistan side of the border.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 20, 2024**

## 3 terrorists killed during intelligence-based operation in Mastung

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Three terrorists – including those involved in the martyrdom of Panjgur Deputy Commissioner (DC) Zakir Ali – were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) by security forces in Mastung during the early hours on August 19, the military’s media wing said in a statement.

The statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said: “These terrorists were involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area and were also responsible for the shahadat of Deputy Commissioner of Panjgur, Mr Zakir Ali, on 12 August 2024.”

Apart from the three dead, three more terrorists were injured after a fierce exchange of fire took place during the operation, according to the ISPR.

“Today’s operation has avenged the heinous act and has brought the perpetrators to justice,” the statement said.

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

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif commended the security forces for killing the terrorists, adding that the elements involved in terrorism should learn from the fate of the killers of DC Panjgur.

“The premier reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering commitment to wipe out the menace of terrorism and said that the war with terrorists will continue until their complete elimination, adding that the entire country stood alongside the armed forces in their fight,” Radio Pakistan reported.

Monday’s operation comes after the Balochistan Chief Minister stated in a press conference last Thursday that intelligence information and evidence indicate that Panjgur DC was martyred by the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA).

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also visited the province on Sunday where he remarked that the prosperity and development of Balochistan were linked to sustainable peace while visiting the Frontier Corps (South) Balochistan.

For decades, the province of Balochistan has been plagued by an insurgency led by separatist groups, some fighting for independence or a greater share of the region’s mineral resources, with security forces often the target of bombings.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 20, 2024**

# Signs of trouble

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**THE state – both its civilian and military components – needs to take note of the troubling developments on the militancy front, before the country is dragged into a new cycle of terrorist violence.**

The signs are not good, as an increasing number of security personnel are being targeted in the field, while militant groups have begun to make inroads in areas thought to have been cleared of the terrorist menace. At least three soldiers were martyred in a gunfight with militants in Bajaur on Sunday, close to the Afghan border. The latest casualties indicate the grim reality that Pakistan has been losing an unacceptably high number of men in confrontations with terrorists.

Moreover, in KP's Tirah valley, there are disturbing reports that fighters belonging to the banned TTP and Lashkar-i-Islam have begun patrols in certain areas. LI had been active in the region for years; its dreaded leader Mangal Bagh was killed in Afghanistan in 2021. The TTP and LI have combined forces in the past, and the reactivation of the latter outfit is a fresh headache for the state.

Where troop fatalities are concerned, as this paper has highlighted previously, better gear and training are required to save lives. As per media figures quoting ISPR, at least 139 troops have been martyred while confronting terrorists up till July 2024. Militants employ asymmetrical methods, which are difficult to counter for traditional militaries. Even the American and Soviet militaries could do little to defeat foes using asymmetrical methods. Therefore, perhaps crack new units need to be trained in such methods to outsmart the militants in the field, while intelligence-based operations should neutralise terrorists before they can strike.

Regarding the patrols of terrorist groups, this development should not be taken lightly by the state. Locals in the Tirah area told this paper that while TTP and LI fighters were moving around with freedom, the police and Levies had 'vanished'. Moreover, residents said militants were demanding food and shelter from them, which the locals could only refuse at their own peril.

The administration cannot leave people in the affected areas at the mercy of terrorists. The writ of the state must be established forthwith as no violent non-state actor can be allowed to set up parallel governance structures. It should be remembered that militants started taking over territory in Waziristan and Malakand in similar fashion. These developments morphed into full-blown insurgencies that required the state to invest much blood and treasure to quell.

The same mistake must not be repeated. Perhaps the powers that be should redirect their attention from 'digital terrorists' and hone in on the actual terrorists who have risen up against the state in the past, and appear intent on doing so again.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 22, 2024**

## 3 killed, policemen among 13 injured in Pishin blast



**This photo shows damaged vehicles after a blast occurred near Surkhab Chowk in Balochistan's Pishin district on Aug 24, 2024.**

**Two children and a woman were killed on Saturday while two policemen were among 13 people injured when a blast occurred at a main market near Surkhab Chowk in Balochistan's Pishin district, hospital officials said.**

The incident is the latest in a string of attacks on police officials and checkpoints, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Attacks escalated after the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022 and vowed to target security forces.

According to a list of the casualties issued by Dr Wakeel Sherani, the medical superintendent at Pishin Civil Hospital, two children were killed in today's blast while 14 were initially injured.

Thirteen of the wounded were referred to the Quetta Trauma Centre, where a woman succumbed to her injuries, a list issued by the hospital's managing director Dr Arbab Kamran showed.

Five injured people were in serious condition, two had minor injuries, the treatment of three was under way and two had been discharged from the Trauma Centre, the list stated.

According to Pishin City Station House Officer (SHO) Mujibur Rehman, the two injured policemen were in critical condition.

“Apparently, the explosive material was planted in a motorcycle,” SHO Rehman said, adding that as a result, three vehicles were damaged.

The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and the Bomb Disposal Squad have reached the incident site to collect evidence for a probe, the official said.

According to state broadcaster PTV News, the blast occurred near the Pishin deputy commissioner’s office.



The attack comes days after two pedestrians were injured in a roadside explosion in Noshki district, which the police said occurred when a convoy of Frontier Corps was passing by.

Last month, a blast in Pishin caused by an improvised explosive device (IED) left three CTD officials and three pedestrians injured. Police officials had said the attack was aimed at a CTD vehicle carrying the department’s personnel.

The same day, in a similar incident, a soldier of the Quick Response Force of the Frontier Corps South was martyred and seven others were injured in Kech district’s Buleda area.

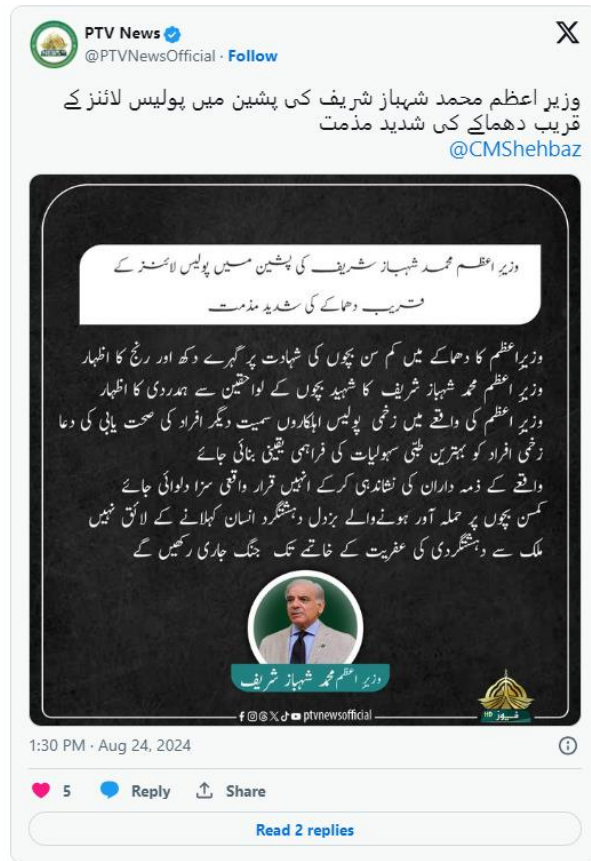
## Condemnations pour in

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif denounced the blast near police lines in Pishin, Radio Pakistan reported.

Expressing deep grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of young children in the explosion, PM Shehbaz said “cowardly terrorists who attack young children do not deserve to be called humans”.

The premier prayed for the recovery of the injured policemen and other people in the incident, directing that they be provided with the best possible medical treatment.

PM Shehbaz called for those responsible for the incident to be identified and given exemplary punishment. He reaffirmed Pakistan’s firm commitment to the war against terrorism.



President Asif Ali Zardari also conveyed his sorrow over the incident to the bereaved families.

“Those responsible should be given exemplary punishment according to the law,” President Zardari said in a statement, reiterating the resolve to continue operations against terrorists.

He prayed for the deceased and their families.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi condemned the blast “near the Police Lines”, expressing grief over the loss of children’s lives.

Extending his sympathies to the children’s families, Naqvi said in a statement: “This war [against terrorism] will continue till the terrorists and their enablers are eradicated.”

He stressed that the fight was for “Pakistan’s honour and to give the future generations a peaceful and safe Pakistan”.

Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured, he said the nation and the security forces stood together in the war against terrorism.



Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti also condemned the blast, stating that the perpetrators wanted to ruin the province’s peace.

“The courage of our security institutions cannot be diminished by such cowardly actions ,” CM Bugti asserted.

“We will completely eradicate this sore of terrorism with the help of the public and the security forces,” the chief minister vowed.

Provincial government spokesperson Shahid Rind condemned the “terrorist incidents in Pishin and Noshki”, regretting the loss of precious human lives.

“Anti-society and anti-state elements do not deserve any concession,” Rind asserted. “Terrorists are targeting innocent and sinless people to achieve their nefarious goals,” he added.

The spokesperson directed the provincial health department to provide the best medical facilities to those injured in the blast.

Source: DAWN, AUGUST 24, 2024



# Missing freedoms

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THE global community has shone a harsh light on the fraying social contract between Pakistan's people and state, as evident in regular protests and the expanding cast of missing persons, including political workers, rights activists, journalists, and YouTubers. The UN has again demanded that Pakistan ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and grant "human, technical and financial resources" to widen and implement measures that prevent and halt enforced disappearances, as well as secure ethnic minorities. On Friday, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination released its findings. It wants the government to "investigate and prosecute" all reports of enforced disappearances involving the Baloch, politicians, administrators, mediapersons and human rights defenders, ensure penalties and accountability for perpetrators and provide restorative justice – restitution of dignity, rehabilitation, compensation and an end to the practice. In the context of Baloch missing persons, Pakistan has made feeble attempts to address impunity and the role of intelligence agencies. While the Supreme Court instituted a Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances in 2011, it took 12 years and a high court's intervention for the Balochistan government to form a committee. Under the PTI, a bill pertaining to enforced disappearances, passed by the National Assembly, went 'missing' after it was sent to the Senate.

Pakistan must introspect. First, it has consistently violated international treaties, including the torture convention and the accord on civil and political rights. Second, lawmakers' tenures will remain tainted without strong laws banning all forms of state-ordained abductions, ending impunity and bringing the intelligence machinery under the law's purview. Third, our touchy establishment needs to understand the gathering storm of retaliation. It stems from pain; the culture of Balochistan stands altered as its women confront oppression. Moreover, every arbitrary confinement, regardless of duration, must be defined and treated as an illegal act. Modernisation is based on a progressive approach towards freedom of expression. A climate of insecurity jeopardises democracy and political parties. Offenders are vitalised when citizens and their opinions are disregarded, breeding discontent and eroding federalism.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 26, 2024**

# Balochistan attacks

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**BAD news keeps coming from Balochistan. Since Sunday night, in a series of coordinated militant attacks across the province, over 70 people, including security personnel, the assailants and ordinary citizens, have lost their lives.**

Starting with the execution-style killing of 23 travellers in Musakhail, the terrorists blew up a railway bridge in Bolan, set several vehicles on fire at a Levies station in Mastung, and gunned down 11 people in Kalat before raiding an FC camp in Bela. This has been the most widespread assault in years. The separatist terrorist outfit BLA has claimed responsibility, maintaining that it had seized control of a big portion of the FC camp and most highways. ISPR asserted that the security forces and law-enforcement agencies responded immediately to these criminal attacks, especially in Musakhail, Kalat and Lasbela, and killed 21 terrorists in ensuing clearance operations. However, it also said that 10 security forces soldiers and four LEAs personnel were martyred during the operation.

These horrific attacks suggest that Baloch militants have intensified their violent campaign against the state and security forces. The army has vowed to bring the “instigators, perpetrators, facilitators and abettors of these heinous and cowardly acts to justice”. Balochistan has been in turmoil for many decades. The last two decades, especially following the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti in an army operation, have seen the emergence of several armed secessionist groups. Strong evidence is said to link some of them to India and other neighbouring countries, who are opposed to the idea of a secure Pakistan. These groups have targeted security forces, public installations, Chinese interests, unarmed Punjabi workers in Balochistan, and politicians who, as opposed to the militants, believe in a democratic struggle for the political and economic rights of the Baloch. Their violent acts and the killing of innocent people must be strongly condemned. The intensity of these attacks should put the whole country, especially its military and political guardians, on alert. That said, although kinetic action against those who target the province so mercilessly is necessary, the civil and security leadership must look deeper into the Balochistan question and identify the factors that have intensified the tension between the Baloch and the state. The reasons behind this wave of disaffection that have led young middle-class men and women to protest are well-known; they pertain to human rights violations, poor socioeconomic conditions, and the denial of political rights. These factors provide a fertile recruiting ground for terrorist groups on the lookout for angry, frustrated elements to join their ranks.

The centre cannot ignore Baloch voices anymore, especially those who condemn violence and want peace and genuine efforts for change. It is only by listening to and cooperating with the people of Balochistan that the terrorists can be eliminated.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 27, 2024**

# Katcha's Costly Casualties

DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

The Katcha areas of Sindh and Punjab have seen countless lives laid down by our brave police officers. Recently, gunmen with rocket-propelled grenades ambushed a police convoy in the Machka area, killing dozens and wounding many more. Even before the fallen officers had been laid to rest, the police announced that the main suspect behind the deadly attack had been killed in a retaliatory operation. This was no surprise – the law of the jungle prevails in this area, and 'justice' is usually delivered by the bullet instead of the courts.

Since 2003, Punjab Police have carried out ten operations in the Katcha area against tribes like the Sikhani, Chotu, Umrani, and Shar, eliminating 58 criminals at the cost of 19 officers' lives. In the past two years, on the Sindh side, there have been over 300 encounters, which have resulted in the deaths of 48 dacoits. Meanwhile, more than 30 officers have been lost in these incidents.

The police's martyrs have been our true shields against the forces of vice. They have put themselves before danger to protect our lives. We owe it to them to ask: were their deaths just a tragic twist of fate, or the result of a systemic failure of our policies and operational capabilities? The answers to that question invariably lead back to the actions – or rather, inactions – of our 'pacca' area elites.



Our police force is, in general, poorly recruited, under-equipped, and barely trained beyond the most basic drills. It consistently finds itself outmatched by better-prepared, trigger-happy criminals. Yes, we have police commandos, but let's be honest: how many are there, and can they be everywhere at once? The police's efforts in the Katcha areas, discussed briefly above, were hampered by the substandard armored personnel carriers (APCs) they use, questionable bounty announcements, inadequate police station infrastructure, and even desertions. Allegations that certain dacoit gangs were armed to combat others raised further concerns about the integrity of these operations.

Then who is to blame for the recent killings of policemen in the Katcha area? The answer seems glaringly obvious: the government and its institutions, their policies, and their dysfunction – both past and present. While acknowledging the complexities involved, it's clear that they have not only failed to do enough but have also actively obstructed meaningful progress.

### Criminal Justice System

The times have changed, and so have the challenges. Law enforcement officers often operate alone, living among those they protect and those who commit crimes. Armed with outdated gear and minimal tactical training, they are often clueless even about how best to protect themselves. Meanwhile, criminals operate with impunity, emboldened by a system that indulges in extrajudicial killings and a government that has long lost the public's trust.

The effectiveness of law enforcement hinges on trust in the criminal justice system. With that hope eroded, everyone now attempts to navigate the law in their way while the state stands by as a mere spectator.

What is disheartening is that 98% of all police casualties consist of lower and upper subordinates – the frontline warriors of law enforcement. It is high time that the police leadership revisited their working strategies – retrained their forces and provided them with proper task briefings for each duty. The leadership should focus solely on law enforcement, resist illegal orders, and recognize that crime is an outcome of broader socio-economic issues. Instead of pleasing the rulers, police leaders should protect their constabulary, stand firm in their duties, and live up to the oath they took to serve the public.

We will continue to see cycles of operations, displacements, casualties on both sides, and brief periods of calm unless the root causes are addressed. Patronage and power dynamics will ensure that these issues resurface whenever it suits certain interests. It is, therefore, time for some serious measures in the riverine belt. A dedicated riverine police force is not just a suggestion, but an imperative. This unit must be specially trained to navigate the challenging Katcha terrain, with advanced tactics and equipment designed specifically for the unique threats posed by this area.

Among non-kinetic measures, we must help resolve local tribal feuds instead of siding with one group against another – a policy that has cost us dearly. Criminals must be dealt with through lawful means, and those driven to crime should be helped to start anew. It is high time we developed these areas, improved accessibility, and socio-economic conditions, and helped the locals see the value in their lives. The riverine force should work in tandem with development

initiatives, ensuring that law enforcement and socio-economic progress go hand in hand. We should do this not just because vital assets like the Guddu Power Plant, the CPEC route, and a main railway line pass in their vicinity, but also to reduce police casualties.



If the government does not move beyond superficial actions and fails to invest in a long-term development and reform program, the cycle of violence and retribution will continue, with the innocent and the valiant both paying the price for the failures of those in power. When state institutions indulge in illegalities, the whole system eventually collapses.

This isn't just a theory; it's a hard-earned lesson from history. Allowing lawlessness to flourish at any level only uplifts criminals and weakens the state's writ, ultimately dooming us all. As the government dabbles in petty politics and avoids addressing the real issues, let's remember who pays the price: not them, but the courageous, the innocent, and the powerless. The police must stop being used as a tool for political ends and should be allowed to shift their focus to where it truly belongs – service delivery and justice.

Source: [WENEWS ENGLISH.PK](http://WENEWS ENGLISH.PK), AUGUST 28, 2024

# AI and gender-based violence

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SAHAR BANDIAL

**IT is said that we stand at the cusp of the “fourth industrial revolution”. The emergence and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-based learning is set to usher in a new era of productivity, efficiency and governance across public and private sectors.**

In recognition of such potential, the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication laid out a draft National Artificial Intelligence Policy last year, which reportedly was to be presented before the cabinet this month. The policy sets out ambitious targets for the use, scaling and proliferation of AI, while recognising – though almost in passing – the need to ensure its ethical and responsible use, which upholds the fundamental rights and privacy of users. Given the state’s existing performance on cyber safety, particularly of women, these assurances appear unrealistic. AI is a broad field that encompasses the development of computer systems capable of simulating human learning, comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making and creativity. It employs tools such as machine learning and deep learning to analyse data (including text and images) to identify patterns, make predictions and generate human-like speech.

ChatGPT may be the most commonly encountered/used generative AI tool. Generative AI generates texts and images in response to commands or prompts submitted by a user. The technology has been put to beneficial use in business settings to, for instance, improve efficiency through automation of simple tasks, synthesise and analyse data to enhance business decision-making, and assist with creative undertakings.

However, there is a flip side. Deepfake technology – a form of generative AI – can create realistic but entirely fake images and videos of persons by analysing existing audiovisual data.

Many of us have come across doctored video clips of prominent personalities online – some comical and others more pernicious in intent and nature. In fact, the latter are predominant on the web: 98 per cent of deepfake videos are pornographic in nature; 99pc target women or girls. These statistics are not surprising. Cases involving deepfake videos (often sexual in nature) targeting women journalists and women politicians have made headlines in Pakistan in the recent past. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), such as deepfake content, also manifests as image-based abuse and blackmail, misinformation/ defamation, impersonation, cyberstalking and violent threats. While men, too, are subject to cyber violence, it is a gendered phenomenon worldwide. Women are the largest victims of online harassment in Pakistan. According to a Pew Research Centre study, while 26pc of women aged 18-24 years experience cyberstalking, only 7pc of men in the same age range do so. Cyberspace is a more unsafe place for women across the world.

AI has now altered the arena where TFGBV plays out, greatly enhancing the apparent authenticity and believability of misinformation and fake news propagated on the internet. This is not just on account of deepfake technology. Generative AI can be used not only to create cyber-harassment templates, but also to generate and modify false, yet convincing personal histories of women, perpetuating the cycle of misinformation and fake news.

TFGBV violates women's right to dignity, privacy and non-discrimination. Many times, it culminates in physical violence. Issues of consent and intellectual property rights also arise with the (often) non-consensual use of copyrighted data by AI technologies – a matter that gained prominence last year in the Hollywood strike against the unlicensed use of actors' AI replicas by motion picture studios.

AI regulation is an evolving field. Given the risks that have arisen with the increased deployment of and access to AI technology, there have been efforts worldwide to regulate its use.

Taking the lead in a human rights-centric approach to AI regulation, the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, 2024, positions safety and compatibility with fundamental rights and freedoms as the guiding principles of AI regulation. It bars the use of AI for biometric surveillance and compilation of facial recognition databases (Article 5) and provides that where video, audio or image content is created with deepfake technologies, disclosure regarding such artificial generation/ manipulation be provided (Article 52).

Unesco's Recommendations on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Use (2023), also stipulate the protection of human rights and freedoms as the first guiding "value" in AI regulation. The US Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, a white paper published by the White House, articulates certain principles for the protection of civil rights and democratic values in the building, deployment, and governance of automated systems. Pakistan's AI policy also recognises the particular dangers of AI to create "fake content such as text, images and videos", and envisions that the AI Regulatory Directorate (ARD) will issue guidelines to address "possible spread of disinformation, data privacy breaches and fake news". The exact mechanism of such regulation may be more minutely spelt out in any AI legislation that is eventually passed.

For now, the existing mechanism, under the Cybercrime Wing of the FIA, has largely been ineffective in addressing the countless complaints of TFGBV made by women under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, which criminalises the transmission of false and defamatory information through an electronic system, distortion of a person's pictures to show her/ him in a sexually explicit position, and cyberstalking. However, as scathingly observed by the Sindh High Court last year, the Cybercrime Wing does not have the "competency to effectively investigate cybercrime, let alone combating th[ese] [offences]".

Blocking the flow of information and traffic on the internet will not serve as a solution. The state must ensure that any future regulation of AI-led TFGBV – to be laid out by the ARD or enforced by the newly formed National Cybercrime Investigation Agency – is effective and upholds the standards of ethics and human rights that its AI policy espouses.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 30, 2024**

# 5 terrorists killed, 3 injured in intelligence-based operations across Balochistan

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**Five terrorists have been killed while three others were injured in intelligence-based operations (IBOs) carried out by security forces in multiple Balochistan districts, the military's media affairs wing said.**

In the latest flare-up of violence, dozens of militants affiliated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) – a separatist outfit – launched numerous attacks on Sunday midnight across Balochistan, targeting security personnel as well as civilians.

At least 50 people, including 14 security men, lost their lives as militants went on a rampage across the province, storming police stations, blowing up railway tracks, and setting fire to almost three dozen vehicles. In response, security forces neutralised 21 militants.

Among those killed were 23 people in Musakhail, mostly labourers from Punjab, who were offloaded from trucks and vans and shot dead after an identity check.

Referring to the deadly attacks earlier this week, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement today: “The security forces are conducting extensive intelligence-based operations (IBOs) to hunt down the perpetrators of these heinous acts.

“On night [of] 29/30 August, in three separate IBOs in District Kech, Panjgur, and Zhob, five terrorists were sent to hell by the security forces, while three terrorists got injured during the intense fire exchange,” the ISPR said.

It added that the sanitisation operations would “continue until all perpetrators, facilitators, and abettors of these atrocious acts are brought to justice”.

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

Following the spate of attacks, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday asserted that there was “no room for any weakness”. Similarly, President Asif Ali Zardari ordered effective measures to ensure the “complete elimination” of terrorism.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi vowed his full support for the Balochistan government in combating terrorism when he visited the province on Tuesday. PM Shehbaz also undertook a one-day trip to the region to assess the security situation there.

12 TTP terrorists eliminated in KP's Khyber district



Later in the day, the ISPR said that security forces were conducting extensive IBOs in the Tirah valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Khyber district based on the reported presence of militants from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) outfit since August 20.

It said security forces "effectively engaged" TTP locations on Wednesday and Thursday, sending 12 terrorists "to hell".

The ISPR said the operations had resulted in a "major setback" for the TTP and its affiliates with 37 terrorists so far "sent to hell" while 14 militants suffered serious injuries.

"The IBOs will continue till peace in the area is restored" and the TTP eliminated, the ISPR said, adding that security forces were "determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country".

#### Rise in terror attacks

On August 19, three terrorists responsible for the killing of Panjgur's deputy commissioner were eliminated in an operation by security forces in Mastung.

Separately, three soldiers were martyred and five terrorists were killed the same day after security forces foiled an infiltration attempt at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district.

In "extensive" IBOs conducted since August 20 in KP's Khyber, security forces had neutralised 25 terrorists and injured 11 others.

The country has lately witnessed a sharp uptick in the number of attacks targeting security forces, other law enforcement agencies, and security checkpoints, particularly in Balochistan and KP.

Attacks escalated after the TTP broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022 and vowed to target security forces.

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.

Islamabad has blamed Kabul for allowing the TTP – a separate group but aligned with the Afghan Taliban – to use Afghan soil for launching attacks inside Pakistan. However, the Taliban administration has denied the charges.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 30, 2024**

# PM in Balochistan

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IN the wake of the recent terrorist rampage in Balochistan, the civilian and military leadership is trying to pick up the pieces and formulate an effective counterterrorism policy in this long-troubled province. In this regard, the prime minister chaired a meeting of the Apex Committee in Quetta, attended by the army chief, where he reiterated the state's resolve to bring peace to Balochistan. He pointed out that there had been "great concern" across the country about what was going on in the province. Earlier, the provincial police chief was replaced, apparently as a reaction to the security lapse that enabled the proscribed BLA to attack civilian and security targets in different parts of Balochistan.

The PM has done the right thing by heading to Balochistan and reassuring its people that the state will not abandon them. However, beyond rhetoric, an honest appraisal of the situation over the last few decades is required by the rulers to bring long-lasting peace to this tortured land. Changing the IG appears to be a knee-jerk, formulaic reaction. It should be remembered that the law and order situation in Balochistan is complex, with 'A' and 'B' areas manned by different LEAs, while it is actually the establishment that calls the shots in the province where security management is concerned. So the provincial police alone are not to blame.

What is needed is a thorough probe involving all agencies and LEAs to investigate the matter and ensure such a security lapse is not repeated.

Moreover, beyond the militarised security approach, a more holistic response is needed to address Balochistan's burning issues, the biggest of which is the people's alienation with the state. The provincial chief minister pointed to this issue when he recently commented that Baloch youth were being systematically alienated from the state through "manipulation". While he is partially right about separatist forces exploiting the Baloch youth's disaffection with the state, it is the administration itself that has played a role in creating this situation by failing to uplift Balochistan socioeconomically over several decades.

The PM, during his Quetta trip, also observed that "obstacles" standing in the way of progress need to be removed. So, while eliminating violent elements that attack the state and citizens is important, it is also crucial that the sense of deprivation that fuels the separatist narrative be addressed. As this paper has mentioned before, there must be genuine political engagement with Balochistan's people, and the democratic process should be allowed to evolve without 'management' from certain quarters. Moreover, the province's abysmal health and education situation needs to change, while Balochistan's people should be given first right in jobs and training in local and foreign projects. Ultimately, ensuring constitutionally guaranteed rights to Balochistan can help turn the tide.

Source: **DAWN, AUGUST 31, 2024**