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Five for 2025 — The key challenges Pakistan must tackle head on in the new year

MADIHA AFZAL



2024 was an eventful year for Pakistan. We have seen a few successes — including an IMF deal and the return of macroeconomic stability, for now — and perhaps a greater number of setbacks, including continued political instability, democratic backsliding, and a worsening security situation.

The country faces formidable challenges in 2025. Here are five major issues that it will need to confront head on in the new year:

A growing, multi-front security threat

As many as 579 civilians were killed in 784 terror attacks in Pakistan in 2024, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, both numbers higher than any year since 2015. Moreover, 383 security forces personnel were killed in these attacks as well as other operations, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) director general Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry.

December 16 marked 10 years since the 2014 Army Public School attack in Peshawar, which claimed the lives of 147 people, including over 130 schoolchildren. It became a turning point in Pakistan’s fight against terrorism.

In the years that followed, the terrorist threat against Pakistan receded in the face of military action, including the Zarb-i-Azb operation against the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). But terrorism in Pakistan has resurged since the TTP found logistical space in Afghanistan after the Afghan Taliban took over in 2021, with attacks and fatalities rising each year. Pakistan has struggled to find a strategy to counter the TTP in recent years and has had no success in pressuring the Taliban to contain the group either.

The terrorist threat facing Pakistan evolved further in 2024 with the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) operating on a larger scale, and shifting its tactics: in Musakhel on August 26, the BLA executed at least 23 workers from Punjab after offloading them from buses and checking their identity cards. In November, the BLA claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed at least 26 people at the Quetta railway station. Moreover, the insurgent group was also responsible for an October attack outside the Karachi airport that killed two Chinese workers.

The government has announced the launch of kinetic action against the BLA. But the people of Balochistan say there is little in the state's response to address their grievances, including over decades-long heavy handedness from the state and the distribution of Balochistan's natural resources. Any coherent, comprehensive strategy for Balochistan will have to address the grievances of citizens while taking decisive action against those who take up arms.

Both the BLA and TTP require the state's focus and attention. The two outfits are different — in their goals, where they draw support, where they recruit — compounding the challenge to the state. BLA and TTP attacks in Pakistan have also contributed to tensions with China and Afghanistan, respectively (discussed next). In 2025, a key challenge will be dealing with two fronts of insecurity — and additional ones, including ballooning sectarian violence — simultaneously.

On top of it all, the state's narrative on terrorism remains full of stiff, awkwardly worded condemnation and platitudes; Pakistan's leaders have still not learned to talk candidly and clearly about the terrorist threat the country faces.

Foreign policy strains

Pakistan's security issues, and in particular, attacks by the BLA on Chinese targets, pose a direct threat to Pakistan's relationship with China and the future of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China recently told Pakistan in no uncertain terms that security threats are “unacceptable” and pose a “constraint” to CPEC.

Attacks by the TTP have in turn caused escalating tensions with Pakistan's western neighbour Afghanistan, which has refused to rein in the group. Pakistan has few good

options when it comes to dealing with the TTP. On December 24, it directly struck TTP targets in Afghanistan, reportedly killing 46 people. The Afghan Taliban countered with retaliatory strikes across the border in Pakistan a few days later.

Pakistan faces a tough situation on the American front as well. The US-Pakistan relationship struggled to find a basis during the Biden years and has been at a low point following the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. One of the final decisions of the Biden administration for Pakistan was to impose sanctions on four Pakistani enterprises — state and private — that supply Pakistan's ballistic missile programme. The second Trump administration brings uncertainty into the mix — but not much hope for improved bilateral relations.

Pakistan is in a tight spot in its relationships with both the US and China. Ultimately, the security problem that bedevils its bilateral relationship with China may be an easier one to tackle than the larger one that confronts its relationship with the US — the lack of a solid basis for a partnership.

Zero-sum politics

Pakistan's zero-sum political crisis that began nearly three years ago with the ouster of Imran Khan continues, to deleterious effect. Protests, arrests, military trials, repression, and a marred election later, it is no closer to resolution.

The government (and the military) sees and treats the political opposition as an existential threat. This kind of politics has resulted in democratic backsliding, a deeply polarised society, a state that is consumed with thwarting the political challenge to it rather than the task of governance, and negative consequences for the economy. Besides, the argument that the political opposition is engaging in “digital terrorism” online has driven away focus from the very real terrorism nightmare faced by the country.

The resolution to this political challenge ultimately will have to be political. The PTI's protests have not succeeded beyond showcasing popular support for the party. The government will have to acknowledge that it has a political opposition that remains incredibly popular. It seems a dialogue between the two sides has begun; reaching some sort of conclusion should be a key goal for 2025.

It is crucial for the incumbent ruling dispensation to recognise that healthy political contestation and accountability will in the long run help all of Pakistan's political players — and are necessary to help the country progress.

Throttling the internet

The state has resorted to an array of blunt moves to curb online dissent and political mobilisation of the opposition — from banning social media platforms, most notably X (formerly Twitter), to throttling the internet and putting up a purported “firewall”. These steps clearly threaten Pakistan’s growing technology industry, and in turn, its economy.

The state has denied some of these moves, including the firewall and throttling internet speeds, but its statements betray a deep suspicion and paranoia of the online space (which the opposition has proven particularly effective at using, including for the 2024 election).

The state’s actions are resulting in accumulating losses for Pakistan’s tech industry. Technology exports amounted to \$3.2 billion for the year ending in June. An estimated 300,000 freelancers in the country work in the technology sector, and hundreds of thousands more rely on internet-based companies like ride-sharing apps to earn their incomes. One estimate suggests that Pakistan’s internet firewall could cost the economy at least \$300 million.

It is ironic that the same government that argues that political stability is necessary for economic growth is, through online repression, hurting a powerful engine of that growth. And in a global economy where an edge in the technology sector is crucial to say the least, it is a deeply regressive approach.

Democratic decline

The state’s response to Pakistan’s political crisis has accelerated the country’s democratic decline. By the end of PDM’s first stint in power in 2023, the Economist Intelligence Unit had already downgraded Pakistan to an “authoritarian regime”.

The backsliding continued in 2024 in the wake of the February general elections, which in itself were marred by allegations of rigging. Ironically, the polls had become controversial even before election day — with months of unconstitutional delay, the leader of arguably the country’s most popular party, the PTI, in jail, and the party forced to contest the elections without its electoral symbol.

Months later, the judiciary, which had served as an important (albeit inconsistent) check on the state’s excesses, was defanged via the 26th amendment, which gave Parliament power to select the chief justice.

Meanwhile, the civilian government appeared to cede further space to the military, by extending the term of the army chief to five years (with a second term also a possibility). The manner in which these changes were rushed through Parliament was as significant as the substance of these changes.

A key challenge for 2025 and beyond — and perhaps the most elusive one — will be for Pakistan’s political parties to work together to avert further democratic decline. The current civilian dispensation may neither have the will nor see the incentive for that right now, but the long-term health of Pakistan’s democracy is necessary for its survival as well.

Priorities, priorities

To sum up, the challenges Pakistan faces are formidable — some are of its own making; most difficult to address. The two it can address head on in the coming year are its political crisis and security challenges.

Tackling the political crisis will be no small feat, but it is crucial because its ripple effects will ease the other challenges described above, including curbs on the internet and the broader democratic decline. This would give the government space to address the country’s security challenges as well.

In terms of security, the state must be prepared to combat terror with force on multiple frontiers, while making every attempt not to further alienate the population that is likely to be affected by these measures.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 1, 2025

Analysis: Can Pakistan stem the tide of terror resurgence?

ISMAIL KHAN



THERE has been a whopping 279.8 per cent increase in the number of terrorist incidents; from 572 in the year 2021 to 2,173 in 2024

STANDING before a select audience in a small but imposing auditorium at the headquarters of Pakistan’s premier intelligence agency, the now-reviled former spymaster, Gen Faiz Hameed flashed slide after slide on two giant LCDs to establish that the Afghan Taliban insurgency — then just weeks away from capturing Kabul — was in fact a ‘Pashtun nationalist uprising’.

Shortly before wrapping up his monologue and opening the floor to questions, Faiz said something diametrically opposite to his long presentation on the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: “Not many people agree with me, but I do believe that the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Afghan Taliban are two faces of the same coin.”

Weeks later, the beaming former ISI chief stood in the lobby of an iconic Kabul hotel, sipping coffee as he waited to meet Afghanistan’s new rulers — the Taliban. “Don’t worry, everything will be okay,” he famously told Channel 4 News’ Lindsey Hilsum.

Now holed up in his interrogation cell, facing a military trial over political meddling, the beleaguered general must be wondering how under his watch, Pakistan's top spy agency — which has been overseeing so many other complex and complicated issues — got the Afghan Taliban-TTP nexus so horribly wrong.

With terror incidents rising and casualty figures mounting year-on-year since August 2021, his brief repartee with Lindsey will probably haunt him forever — a reversal of the hard-fought gains against militants in successive military operations in Pakistan's troubled border regions.

A simple chart showing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's descent into violence since the Taliban's rise to power in Kabul would be enough to illustrate how quickly Pakistan's optimism over the Afghan Taliban's ability to rein in the TTP turned into a nightmare.

If the sharp spike doesn't explain the trajectory of violent incidents and fatalities that has befallen KP, consider the percentage. There has been a whopping 279.8 per cent increase in the number of terrorist incidents from 2021's 572 to 2,173 in 2024. Likewise, casualty figures shot up by a staggering 231pc, from 238 in 2021 to 788 in 2024.

Similarly, compared to 2023, the number of terrorist incidents in KP shot up by 54.89pc while casualties increased by 11.9pc. On average, the province lost two men per day, including personnel from the security forces, civilian law enforcement and ordinary citizens.

Overall, KP's south remains quite troubled, with spikes in attacks in the two Waziristans, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Lakki Marwat and Karak. The Malakand and Hazara regions, meanwhile, have remained relatively peaceful — with a major exception being the attack on Chinese workers in Bisham, Shangla in March, 2024. Kurram, together with Khyber's scenic Tirah Valley, saw a resurgence of militants, bringing renewed threats to the provincial capital Peshawar.

Contrast this with the security situation in Afghanistan in the period before and after the return of the Taliban. The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG), in its August 2022 report, while acknowledging the “dramatic shifts in the security situation”, noted five-fold decrease in the rate of battles, explosions and other forms of violence per week during the first ten months of the Taliban rule, compared to the same period during Ashraf Ghani's regime.

IBOs

Amid mounting concerns over the escalating attacks across KP, the military launched small-scale operations and intelligence-based operations (IBOs).

At a media briefing last week, the head of the military's media department said that over 59,000 IBOs were conducted across Pakistan in 2024 — an average of 161 operations per day. Although KP-specific IBO figures were not available, official statistics suggest that a total of 384 militants were killed over the course of the year.

Meanwhile, the proportion of “own” casualties versus militant losses is huge.

This gap between the effort to hunt down militants and the damage they have sustained may be explained by the complex nature of guerilla warfare, but while the TTP and its affiliates have not been able to find a permanent foothold, their spread and presence has increased manifold.

“Clearly, the existing strategy is not working to cause a significant dent. This is not sustainable. We need deliberations to take stock of the situation and frame a new strategy to overcome the problem,” an insider said, pointedly.

Opinions vary as to why, despite a huge effort, Pakistan's counter-terrorism campaign has not been able to overcome its security challenges and cause a significant dent in the rise of militancy.

According to background discussions with security officials, there are many factors that have contributed to this.

Afghanistan

Pakistan's western neighbour continues to be a problem. In recent diplomatic engagements, credible sources say the ruling Taliban have again sought time to fix the TTP issue, referring to their efforts to relocate militants and their families away from the border to Ghazni province in central Afghanistan.

The cost of construction of houses and relocation to the tune of seven digits in dollar terms, according to the source, was borne by a friendly state.

Islamabad has conveyed to the interim Taliban regime that it must control and rein in the TTP. Kabul, on its part, has sought some concessions in trade and visa regimes, and some agreements are ready to be signed.

But Islamabad has told the Taliban leadership it would evaluate Kabul's response to its concerns in the coming weeks, before it contemplates delivering on the promises.

Pakistan has also urged the Afghan Taliban to recover sophisticated American weaponry from the TTP, discourage them from crossing the border and arrest those who do that.

Government officials continue to complain that the Afghans allow free cross-border movement and no punitive action is taken against those doing it.

Political ownership

The issue of political ownership of the ‘fight against terror’, or lack thereof, was hotly debated at one of the recent apex committee meetings, amid the provincial government’s ambivalent attitude. It was made clear to the KP chief minister, according to a senior official, that the armed forces were in the province at the request of the provincial government under Article 245 of the Constitution, and that it should step up and take full ownership and responsibility.

Besides, the government was urged to spare more resources to enable the Counter Terrorism Department to fight an enemy that was better armed and equipped with advanced US weaponry.

Owing to their grievances against the establishment, almost all political parties in KP are reluctant to lend support to large-scale military operations, while at the same time expressing concerns over the deteriorating security situation in the province.

Complicating the fight further is the overall political polarisation at the national level, which has not only impacted the political mood in KP, but has also brought about an informal alliance of divergent political views to oppose military operations, even in hotbed areas.

Clearance vs containment

Adding to the complexity of the challenges, the TTP has been able to successfully adopt the Afghan Taliban playbook by declaring it would only target men in uniform and avoid targeting civilians in an attempt to drive a wedge between the security forces and the citizenry. This is largely in line with group leader Mufti Noor Wali’s own strategy, outlined in a booklet he had authored before he became its head.

Officials and analysts believe that much of the state’s efforts were focused on containment rather than clearance, and that the issue could be sufficiently addressed if forces are deployed in sufficient number.

But while there is a general agreement to undertake military operations in a couple of regions in a phased manner, the lack of public and political support, and appetite for another round of displacement, is complicating the issue.

Officials and analysts believe it is time to re-visit the counter-terrorism strategy, and focus more on the use of technology to track, monitor, surveil and strike, coupled with a whole set of political, legal and administrative reforms.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 2, 2025

Recycling chaos: Will 2025 be any different for Pakistan?

The year 2024 will be remembered as a year of reactionary policies — of missiles flying in from Iran being met with a counter-strike in Sistan-Balochistan and cross-border militancy being responded to with retaliatory airstrikes in Afghan territory. It will also be remembered as the year domestic militancy surged unchecked, with over 1,000 reported attacks leaving at least 951 dead and countless injured. From the Quetta Railway Station bombing to the Dukki Mine tragedy, the ongoing Kurram killings and the Peshawar Mosque bombing, we saw protectors turn into prey as hostile elements exploited the weaknesses of a system that is failing to protect itself. The question now is: will 2025 bring more of the same — rhetoric, retaliation, and ruin — or will our state retreat, regroup and adopt strategic clarity?

The outgoing year saw Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan endure relentless violence, with militant groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) operating with near impunity. An increase in urban crime and fresh disturbances in the riverine belt added to the pandemonium, creating an impression that Pakistan was facing a perfect storm. Though our security forces fought back valiantly, their sacrifices now demand urgent introspection. The authorities must be asked why militants seem to be growing bolder with each passing day.

Is it a failure of our capacity to deal with emergent threats, a breakdown in intelligence, or simply an outcome of systemic negligence? There is also the more troubling question: does this disorder serve some hidden agenda which requires the nation to be trapped in an endless cycle of reactionary governance? Without genuine introspection and action, Pakistan risks perpetuating its failures and ensuring that history repeats itself in the coming year.

Ordinary Pakistanis are not inherently extremist. However, decades of flawed policies have normalized societal tolerance for violence, while slogans like “We’re killing terrorists”, “It’s all foreign-sponsored”, “Taliban’s return to the KP was a mistake”, and “Balochistan’s issues are externally fueled” have distracted public attention from the actual problems. The state’s knee-jerk responses — its tendency to treat every issue like a nail, and hammer away — have failed to yield any lasting solutions.

Meanwhile, governance has collapsed under the weight of bad policies, elite capture, corruption, and media sensationalism; faith in the state lies in tatters, eroded by hypocrisy and inertia; the Internet is throttled, public rallies are considered ‘unpatriotic’, and speaking one’s heart out is treason. Meanwhile, anti-state narratives thrive, feeding on the state’s inability to inspire faith. Even seemingly progressive moves, like finalizing the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2024 and prevention of violent extremism policy, have failed to bridge the gap between the state and its people.

As we enter 2025, Pakistan must break free from its dependency on reactionary governance. Public trust, shattered by years of hypocrisy and incompetence, must be rebuilt with carefully considered and sustainable measures. The lessons offered by 2024 — and the years preceding it — demand a review, some accountability, and a clear vision for progress. Unless Pakistan directly confronts its challenges, it risks repeating the same cycle of chaos.

The recommendations for 2025 are clear: firstly, the responsibility for governance must be returned to its rightful stewards — civilian leaders and law enforcement agencies. Supporting institutions, including the military and judiciary, must focus on aiding rather than dictating policy. Fault must be non-negotiable, with clear mechanisms to hold officials responsible for missteps, as was demanded after the APS massacre.

Secondly, it must be understood that public trust will only be restored through honesty and accountability. Institutions must admit their failures, ensure justice for victims, and engage the communities affected by their policies in their decision-making. After-action reviews should become standard practice so that mistakes become lessons that inform future strategies. Open communication and inclusive governance are essential to closing the gap between the state and its citizens.

Thirdly, the authorities must realize they cannot continue to rule through ad-hoc measures. Important policies with a wide impact must be revised and rooted in the rule of law and long-term planning. Merit and professionalism, not political loyalty, should guide appointments and decisions, and policymaking at the highest levels should be about addressing systemic challenges rather than firefighting crises as they happen.

Fourthly, Pakistan’s education system — which includes public schools, private institutions, and madrassas — needs to be comprehensively reformed. There is a need to identify ideological biases which have fostered extremism and violence and consciously eliminate them. The state must oversee a curriculum that promotes critical thinking, tolerance and inclusivity and fosters civic responsibility if societal cohesion is to be rebuilt.

Fifth, diplomacy must be re-prioritized if we wish to achieve regional stability. We must strengthen collaboration with neighboring countries, especially on combating cross-

border terrorism and improving intelligence sharing. Pakistan must also adopt global best practices in counterterrorism to better leverage the expertise and resources available at the international level.

Sixth, we must realize that economic despair fuels extremism. The focus needs to remain on generating employment, empowering local industries, and promoting equitable development in the most affected and underrepresented regions, especially Balochistan and the merged districts of KP. Radicalization cannot be countered without improved opportunities for economic empowerment.

Lastly, there needs to be some appreciation of the fact that decades of instability have taken a massive psychological toll. The state must prioritize access to mental health services, particularly for youth in conflict-affected areas.

The year 2025 should be the year Pakistan breaks the cycle of reactionary governance. However, unless there is reflection and introspection which leads to systemic change, history is bound to repeat itself. Will it be successful in this endeavor? Time will tell.

SOURCE: [ARABNEWS.PK/NODE/2585030](https://arabnews.pk/node/2585030)

4 dead, 32 injured as bus targeted in blast in Balochistan's Turbat



A bus targeted in an attack in Turbat, Balochistan

Four people were killed and 32 injured in a blast targeting a bus in the suburban area of Balochistan's Turbat, according to the police.

Rabia Tariq, public relations officer for the Balochistan inspector general of police's office, confirmed the toll to Dawn.com, adding that the nature of the blast was being assessed, but full details would be provided only after an investigation.

She said as per the initial details, a bus going from Karachi to Turbat was targeted in the New Bahman area, adding that the injured were moved to a nearby hospital with five being in critical condition.

Tariq said a large number of police and security forces reached the scene and cordoned off the area and further investigations were being conducted regarding the blast.

She said Quetta Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Zohaib Mohsin was also going to Turbat with his family and was caught in the blast.

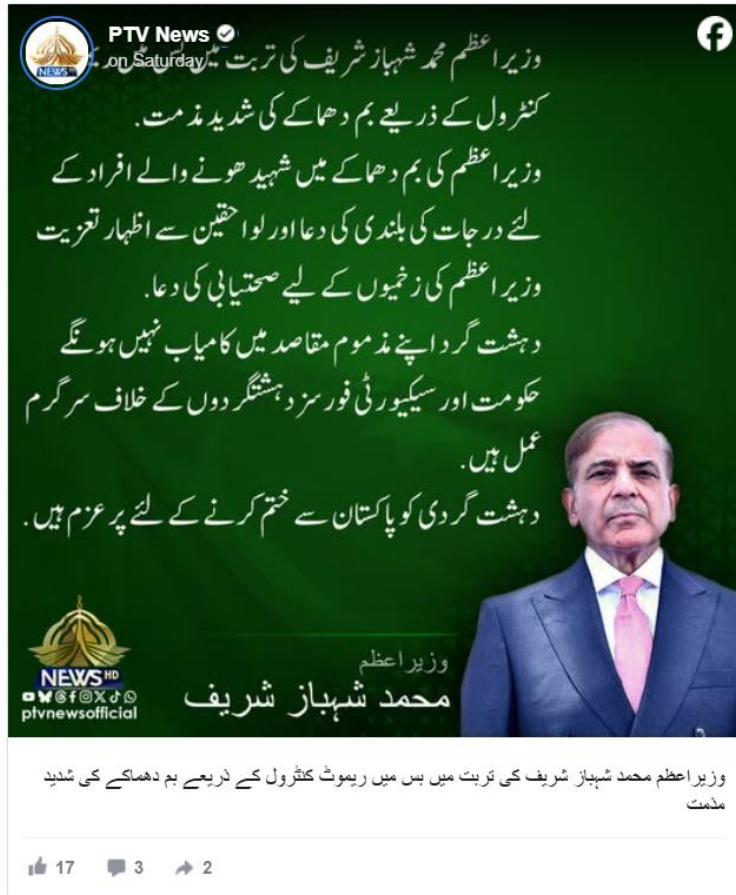
A statement from Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind said SSP Mohsin was slightly injured, along with four of his family.

Rind said the bodies would be sent to their native areas after the necessary formalities and the injured were being provided medical assistance while those seriously injured were being moved to other cities.

The banned militant Balochistan Liberation Army group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned the attack and offered prayers for the deceased and injured.

“Terrorists will not be successful in their nefarious purposes. The government and security forces are working hard against the terrorists. There is determination to eliminate terrorism from Pakistan.”



Condemning the attack, Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti expressed “deep grief and sorrow over the loss of precious human lives”.

He further said that “those who target the innocent do not deserve to be called human beings,” adding that he shared in the grief of the families affected by the incident and prayed for the recovery of the wounded.

One person was injured in a bomb attack on a gas company's vehicle in Qila Saifullah district on Wednesday. Police officials said terrorists had planned to attack the camp of the Oil and Gas Development Corporation Limited located on the outskirts of Qila Saifullah.

In November last year, at least 26 people were killed and 62 injured after a suicide blast ripped through a Quetta Railway Station, local authorities and hospital officials said.

Pakistan, particularly Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saw a sharp uptick in terrorism-related incidents in 2024.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63pc of the total recorded this year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 4, 2025

Five FC men among six martyred in Kech blast

GWADAR/ QUETTA: At least six people, including five Frontier Corps (FC) personnel, were martyred and 35 others, including children, suffered injuries when an explosive-laden vehicle hit a coach in the Turbat area of Kech district.

Officials said SSP Zohaib Mohsin, who was on leave and was passing through the area along with his family in his vehicle, also sustained injuries in the blast.

While claiming responsibility for the attack on the coach, which was taking FC personnel from Karachi to Turbat, the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) said its Majeed Brigade carried out the blast.

According to reports, when the coach reached the new Behman area, on the outskirts of Turbat, the explosive-laden vehicle hit the coach after which they caught fire.

Police and FC personnel immediately rushed to the site after the tragic incident and launched a rescue operation and shifted the bodies and the injured to hospital.

“An explosive-laden vehicle was used in the attack,” an official confirmed on condition of anonymity, adding that five people have lost their lives in the attack.

Four of the martyred were later identified as Noor Khan hailing from Dasht area of Kech, Abdul Wahab from Gwadar, Mohammad Ejaz from Gishkor area of Awaran and Liaquat Ali from Sohbatpur, sources said.

“We have received 11 injured at district hospital, including the family of SSP (serious crimes) Zohaib Mohsin,” Dr Ahmed Baloch confirmed to Dawn.

He said there were at least four children among the injured. He added that one security personnel was also brought to the hospital, but he was later shifted to FC health facility.

Sources said a total of 55 people were hurt in the suicide attack and 20 of them were discharged after being given first aid. The condition of 10 victims was stated to be serious. Police identified them as Zohaib, Changez, Shahzad Ahmed, Haider, Jalal, Sultan, Abdullah, Najeeb Ahmed, Muhammad Aslam and Muhammad Idrees.

Sources said SSP (serious crimes) Zohaib Mohsin, who hails from Turbat, was with his family in his vehicle when the attack was carried out.

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti and ministers condemned the attack, though none among them was available to give details of the incident.

President Asif Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also condemned the terrorist attack, adds Radio Pakistan.

In their separate statements, they expressed deep grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 5, 2025

CRIME DIARY: Who is responsible for Libya boat capsized tragedy?

BY SHAKEEL ANJUM



Footage of the migrant boat hours before it capsized.

Islamabad: In an unprecedented move, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has exercised ruthless accountability against its own personnel, dismissing a significant number of corrupt officials found complicit in human smuggling networks, addressing negligence and complicity within the agency, particularly in light of recent human trafficking tragedies.

According to the FIA's Director General, Ahmed Ishaq Jahangir, 35 officials have been dismissed from service for their alleged roles in facilitating illegal migration and failing to uphold their duties. The dismissed personnel include 4 inspectors, 10 sub-inspectors, 2 assistant sub-inspectors (ASIs), 5 head constables, and 14 constables. These individuals were found to have links with human smuggling mafias involved in the tragic boat incidents that claimed the lives of many Pakistanis.

In addition to these dismissals, legal proceedings have been initiated against 13 FIA officials implicated in human trafficking. The agency is leaving no stone unturned in ensuring that those responsible are held accountable for their actions.

The FIA authorities have ramped up efforts to cleanse its ranks. The DG reviewed disciplinary proceedings against 49 officials accused of negligence or active involvement

in human smuggling networks. This marks a critical step towards restoring integrity and trust within the agency.

These actions reflect a broader commitment by the FIA to combat human trafficking and send a strong message that corruption and negligence will not be tolerated within its ranks.

In the wake of tragic incidents involving Pakistani migrants in Mediterranean boat disasters, the government has vowed to intensify efforts against human trafficking. The Prime Minister directed strict actions against officials and traffickers implicated in facilitating such activities.

Earlier, in June 2023, one of the deadliest maritime disasters unfolded off the coast of Pylos, Greece, claiming hundreds of lives, including 209 Pakistanis. Previously in the year, Pakistanis were among dozens of migrants who perished in similar incidents of Libya and Italy.

The PM condemned human trafficking as a disgraceful offense tarnishing Pakistan's image. He criticised the slow pace of action following the 2023 boat disasters and called for immediate accountability of those involved.

The FIA made headway in investigating the Greece boat disaster. Two immigration officers were arrested, and cases have been registered against three human smugglers. Efforts are underway to identify and prosecute others involved.

In June 2023, an inquiry committee led by Ehsaan Sadiq was tasked with investigating the Greece shipwreck and proposing reforms. Key recommendations from the report included: Major human traffickers should be tried within a month, with courts receiving full support to expedite proceedings. Properties and equipment linked to trafficking must be confiscated under the Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA), 2010. Fugitive traffickers abroad should be arrested through Interpol. Investigations into the assets and performance of FIA officials in high-risk regions, such as Lahore, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi, are essential. And a coordinated national action plan should be developed to tackle human smuggling and enhance legal migration pathways.

To strengthen enforcement mechanisms and deter trafficking, the following measures are being considered: Establishing a Human Smugglers Watch List to monitor networks and impose sanctions. Designating special magistrates for speedy trials of trafficking cases. Increasing the remand period for trafficking suspects to 30 days. Introducing witness protection mechanisms and ensuring compensation for victims through seized assets. And enhancing collaboration between local police and FIA to crack down on smuggling operations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) was directed to devise a plan for the repatriation of Pakistanis stranded in Libya, in collaboration with Pakistan's embassies and international partners like the UN and EU. MoFA will also pursue transparency in investigations related to the Greece shipwreck through dialogue with Greek authorities.

The FIA was tasked with improving its operational capabilities, including: Establishing dedicated Anti-Human Smuggling Circles in high-risk areas. Upgrading data systems to track and analyze crimes effectively. And increasing vigilance at airports to identify and intercept potential trafficking victims and suspects, the report said.

The government plans to launch a nationwide awareness campaign against human trafficking. This initiative, spearheaded by the Ministry of Information, will involve collaborations with TV, Radio, and civil society organisations. Additionally, skill development programs in vulnerable districts will be introduced to reduce migration pressures.

The catastrophic loss of Pakistani lives in Mediterranean boat capsize disasters has highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive action against human trafficking. The government's multifaceted approach, encompassing accountability, legislative reforms, and international collaboration, aims to curb this menace and protect vulnerable populations from exploitation.

This tragic recurrence accentuates a grave oversight: the failure to implement the Ehsaan Sadiq committee's recommendations. Despite clear guidelines to prevent such disasters, the concerned authorities inexplicably ignored these measures. Their inaction not only allowed human smuggling networks to persist but also paved the way for yet another devastating tragedy, eerily mirroring the events of a year earlier. This raises serious questions about accountability and the systemic neglect that continues to cost innocent lives.

SOURCE: THE NEWS, JANUARY 5, 2025

Two policemen martyred in Lakki Marwat



Constables Hikmatullah and Khan Bahadar

Two police constables were martyred when unidentified gunmen riding motorbikes opened fire at them in Lakki Marwat’s Jabukhel area, an official said.

Police Department’s Spokesperson Shahid Hameed confirmed the incident and said that it occurred within the limits of the Ghanikhel police station.

He said that the assailants “opened fire on Constables Hikmatullah and Khan Bahadar when they were going to their duty place on a motorcycle from Kherukhel Pacca area”.

“Both of them received critical bullet injuries and died instantly while the attackers fled the place on a motorcycle,” the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that the martyred police officials were deployed at the Shaheed Haibat Ali Khan police station of Darra Pezu town and Shahbazkhel police station, respectively.

“The bodies were shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital Tajazai for post-mortem examination,” he said, adding that a heavy contingent of law enforcement officers arrived at the scene, launching a search operation to apprehend the attackers.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

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

On Jan 4, two soldiers travelling in a passenger coach from Karak were kidnapped by terrorists in the Kurrum Par area of Lakki Marwat district.

Meanwhile, two civilians and a policeman lost their lives and 18 others, including nine law-enforcement personnel, were injured in three separate blasts in South Waziristan Lower and Bannu and an attack on a police check post in Dera Ismail Khan district on January 1.

Overall, 341 terrorists were killed in 2,801 IBOs in the first 10 months of 2024, according to the interior ministry, Dawn.com reported.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 6, 2025

PM Shehbaz directs immediate property confiscation of all human trafficking groups



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs the meeting on the progress upon the measures taken against human trafficking in Islamabad on Jan 6.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed that strict legal action be taken against all human trafficking groups in the country to set an example, including immediate legal action to confiscate the properties and assets of human traffickers.

Last month, several Pakistanis died in a boat capsizing incident in Greece. As per the estimate, more than 80 Pakistanis drowned in the accident, 36 of whom were rescued. The remaining have been presumed dead.

A spokesman for the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Islamabad had said in a statement that following an investigation into the Greek boat capsizing, two FIA immigration officers were arrested, and a case was registered against three human smugglers, including the FIA officials.

More than 30 FIA officers have been booked and dismissed from service over their alleged collusion with human smugglers in illegally sending Pakistanis abroad.

PM Shehbaz chaired a review meeting today on measures taken against human trafficking in the country, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister appreciated the recent actions taken by the Federal Investigation Agency against government officials involved in human trafficking.

Following disciplinary actions, he further directed that strict punitive measures should also be taken against facilitators.

In the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on the measures taken against human trafficking, progress in the legal actions against facilitators, and in legislation for the eradication of human trafficking.

The prime minister said that the prosecution process against all individuals involved in the heinous trade should be made more effective, adding that top lawyers should be appointed for prosecution after consultation with the law ministry.

The prime minister said the Foreign Office should contact relevant countries to expedite the extradition of Pakistanis running human trafficking operations abroad.

He further directed that the information ministry, in collaboration with the interior ministry, launch an awareness campaign to educate the public about using only legal channels for overseas employment.

He said the country should promote technical training institutions that could provide certified professionals to the international market according to modern requirements, adding that the screening process for individuals travelling abroad at airports should be made more effective.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 6, 2025

Missing persons commission logs 379 new cases in 2024

A total of 379 missing persons cases were submitted to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIOED) in 2024.

The commission was set up in 2011 to trace the missing persons and fix responsibility on the individuals or organisations responsible. Figures released on Tuesday showed that 427 cases were disposed of in 2024.

The commission said that the total number of cases received up till December 2024 was 10,467 while 8,216 cases were disposed of with a total of 6,599 people traced so far and 1,617 cases disposed of.

The report added that 2,251 cases were left while 4,613 were returned home, 1,011 were present in internment centres, 687 were in prisons and 288 were found dead.

The monthly progress report for December, dated January 1, said 29 cases were received and 44 were disposed of with 10 of them unrelated to enforced disappearances, 23 returned to their homes, five were confined in internment centres, four were confined in jails and two bodies were found.

The Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court emphasised last month that only parliament holds the authority to address and resolve the longstanding, yet unlawful, practice of enforced disappearances — a persistent issue that has plagued the nation for decades.

“The solution to this problem is to be found by parliament,” observed Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, a member of the six-judge Constitutional Bench.

“The court has always recognised parliament as the supreme body and now it is for parliament to prove it so,” he said.

On April 23, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar had said that the issue of missing persons could “not be solved overnight” but the government was committed to finding a solution by first achieving a consensus amongst all stakeholders.

The law minister emphasised that when discussing the issue of missing persons, it must be noted that Pakistan had performed the role of a frontline state in a war-ridden area for the

past four decades, adding that the circumstances in neighbouring countries had further exacerbated internal challenges.

Azam noted that the people and army of Pakistan had paid an “unbelievable price” in the fight against terrorism with their sacrifices, adding that the same must be taken into consideration when finding a solution to the issue of missing persons.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 7, 2025

3 soldiers martyred, 19 terrorists killed in KP operations



A combination photo of Naik Muhammad Nazir, Lance Havaldar Abbas Ali and Naik Muhammad Usman.

Three soldiers were martyred and 19 terrorists were killed in three separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media wing said.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that in the first instance, eight terrorists were "sent to hell" after an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted in Peshawar's Matani area, where the terrorists were engaged at the location.

Eight more were neutralised in an IBO in Mohmand district's general area of Baizai and three more in Karak district, the ISPR said.

It added the operations were conducted between Monday and Tuesday.

The ISPR said that Lance Havaldar Abbas Ali, 38, resident of Ghizer district; Naik Muhammad Nazir, 37, resident of Skardu district and Naik Muhammad Usman, 37, resident of Attock district, "fought gallantly" during the intense exchanges of fire and were martyred.

Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists, the statementsaid.

“Security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve,” the ISPR concluded.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government. With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded the past year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated. The overall fatalities recorded last year were a record nine-year high, and over 66pc more than in 2023. On average, nearly seven lives were lost daily.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 7, 2025

Pakistan's great internal security challenges in the new year

ABDUL BASIT KHAN

In 2024, Pakistan's internal security landscape became more volatile, fluid and complex. As militant attacks surge by 70 percent as compared to 2023, four trends have crystallized which will remain major security challenges for Pakistan in 2025.

First, Pakistan's internal security challenges are linked to its immediate neighbors, Afghanistan, Iran and India. The two main threat groups, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) are getting some form of external support and assistance to sustain their violent campaigns. While BLA has sanctuaries in Iran, TTP enjoys Taliban's patronage in Afghanistan. A recent report by the Washington Post has also revealed how an Indian-funded terror network has been involved in covert assassination campaigns in Pakistan. In 2024, Pakistan twice carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan against TTP's hideouts and also engaged in tit-for-tat missile exchanges with Iran. Externally enabled insurgencies and violent campaigns persist longer and are hard to eliminate unless their hideouts and leaders are neutralized.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan's kinetic operations inside its borders will be only tactically effective in the absence of proactive diplomacy with Afghanistan and Iran to address the challenge of militant sanctuaries. In other words, Pakistan's security and diplomatic responses have to work in tandem to create the required momentum for lasting peace and security.

Second, militancy in Pakistan is likely to persist for the foreseeable future and it will not vanish only through military operations. The use of hard force in counterterrorism is necessary but not sufficient to eradicate the menace of violent extremism. It is employed to blunt the sharp edge of terrorism and then non-kinetic or non-military strategies are employed to transform military gains into permanent political advantage for peace and security. Often, the absence of violence due to the use of hard power is mistaken for peace. This has happened in Pakistan in the aftermath of Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2016, where TTP's weakening and relocation to Afghanistan was confused with its elimination. However, following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 which had a rejuvenating impact on TTP, reversed these fragile gains. Pakistan's new counterterrorism

strategy which focuses on non-kinetic components along with expediting the ongoing Intelligence Based Operations is a step in the right direction.

Rather than viewing terrorism as an aberration, Pakistani policymakers will have to reimagine it as a process which has its deep roots in complex historical, political, strategic, ideological and geographical factors. Understanding this will not only help policymakers take a more holistic view of the internal security framework but also assist them in addressing the structural factors of violence. Terrorism in Pakistan neither emerged overnight, nor will it vanish because of one or two major military operations. The fight against terrorism is a generational struggle where a whole-of-state-and-society approach is needed to change radical mindsets, ideological narratives and approaches to political activism (from violent to non-violent). For this, overcoming internal political differences and existing social polarization is paramount.

Third, addressing non-violent extremism will also remain a major security challenge for Pakistan in 2025. Critically, violent and non-violent extremism are two sides of the same coin. The former is action-based extremism while the latter is value-based extremism. Both share similar world views, value systems and end goals and only differ in their approaches.

A security-centric approach against non-violent extremism is counterproductive and requires alternative political approaches grounded in democracy, peaceful co-existence, respect for diversity and differences of opinion. Over the years, the state's proclivity for undermining major political parties has allowed radical outfits like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to flourish. Even if Pakistan manages to tackle outfits like TTP and BLA, radical ideologies proliferated by non-violent outfits will create new security challenges for the state.

Finally, cooperation and alliances between and among different terror and insurgent groups will be another major security challenge for Pakistan in 2025. Last year, at least 16 militant outfits across Pakistan pledged their oaths of allegiance to TTP. Since July 2020, as many as 65 militant outfits have merged into TTP, boosting its operational strength, enhancing its organizational capacity, extending its geographical reach beyond northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and adding to its lethality and longevity. At the same time, different militant outfits like TTP, Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Lashkar-e-Islam also cooperated with each other for joint attacks in 2024. A similar pattern was also visible among Baloch separatists which not only improved coordination between their different sub-organs but continued to hold pre-existing alliances, such as the Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS). Terror alliances are positively linked to groups' resilience and lethality. The more a terror group is allied, the longer it lives and the more violent it becomes. Keeping in view

this trend, Pakistani policymakers should devise strategies to weaken inter and intra group alliances between terror groups.

In 2025, Pakistan will have to navigate a complex threat landscape by combining its security approach with diplomatic and political strategies to restore peace. None of the factors outlined above require a reinvention of the wheel; what is required is a change of mindset in understanding 'terrorism' and the approaches to counter it within existing policy frameworks and security paradigms.

SOURCE: ARABNEWS.PK, 8 JANUARY 2025

5 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in KP's DI Khan

Five terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan, according to the military's media wing.

A statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) today said security forces conducted an IBO in DI Khan's general area of Maddi on the "reported presence" of terrorists.

It said security forces "effectively engaged" the terrorists at their location due to which, five, including ringleader Shafiullah alias Shafi were "sent to hell".

It added that they were actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and targeted killings of innocent civilians. The ISPR said weapons and ammunition were recovered from them.

Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists, the statement said.

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

President Asif Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to the security forces for the operation.

In separate messages received here, the president and prime minister appreciated the bravery of the security forces.

The president said, "The security forces are conducting operations to eliminate the menace of terrorism. The entire nation is united against terrorism."

He also reiterated the commitment to the complete elimination of terrorism from the country.

PM Shehbaz praised the professional skills of the officers and personnel participating in the operation.

"We will continue the war against the scourge of terrorism until its complete elimination from the country. The entire nation stands in support of its brave forces in the war against

terrorism. The people of Pakistan also pay tribute to the security forces who participated in the war against the enemies of the country without caring for their lives,” the prime minister said.

On Tuesday, the ISPR said three soldiers were martyred and 19 terrorists were killed in three separate engagements in KP.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government. With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded the past year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated. The overall fatalities recorded last year were a record nine-year high, and over 66pc more than in 2023. On average, nearly seven lives were lost daily.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 10, 2025

9 terrorists killed during security operations in North Waziristan

Security forces killed nine terrorists while conducting two separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, with two terrorists arrested and two others wounded, the military's media wing said in a statement.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted by the security forces in general area Dosalli, on [the] reported presence of Khwarij".

During the engagement, security forces killed six terrorists, while two others were taken into custody, the ISPR said.

Another IBO was conducted in Esham, where "after intense fire exchange, three Khwarij were neutralised by security forces, while two Khwarij got injured", the statement read.

The ISPR stated that weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain terrorists, who "remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as target killing of innocent civilians".

"Sanitisation operations are being conducted to eliminate any other kharji found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," the statement concluded.

In July, the government, through an official notification, designated the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as Fitna al Khawarij, while mandating all institutions to use the term khariji (outcast) when referring to the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on Pakistan.

On Friday, the ISPR reported that five terrorists were killed in an IBO in KP's Dera Ismail Khan.

A statement issued by the media wing said security forces conducted an IBO in DI Khan's general area of Maddi on the "reported presence" of terrorists. It said security forces "effectively engaged" the terrorists at their location due to which, five, including ringleader Shafiullah alias Shafi were "sent to hell".

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

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SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 12, 2025

Odious trade

WHEN home feels like a sinking ship, people are forced to make ill-fated journeys for a better life. Last month, numerous Pakistanis died in yet another Greek boat tragedy. According to the US State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, the Pakistani authorities fell far short of meeting minimum criteria in several important areas. For a country viewed as a human trafficking hub, the absence of an official database of victims and trafficking rings, coupled with the inability to ensure efficient investigation, expedient prosecution and conviction of traffickers, is not only alarming, it also fuels unbridled exploitation. In this bleak scenario, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's orders to take severe legal action against the human trafficking mafia, including the confiscation of their assets, are encouraging. But as necessary as it is to clamp down on trafficking networks who prey on poverty and desperation, it is equally crucial to reflect on the circumstances that compel citizens to risk their lives.

The vast and multilayered crime of human trafficking requires a wider, pre-emptive and result-driven strategy from the government. Battling complicit officials and powerful interests tops the list of major challenges — an insurmountable reality without unrelenting political commitment. Moreover, as influential perpetrators get away with the imposition of fines instead of incarceration, the on-ground enforcement of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018 remains insignificant, rendering it ineffective as a deterrent. Eradicating human trafficking is one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. But estimates show that traffickers dupe thousands of Pakistanis every year due to acute poverty, lack of education, unemployment and violence. Hence, the prime minister's call for technical training is a long shot because urgent financial support is any household's priority. Besides, eliminating human traffickers begins with a toughened legal system and a security apparatus empowered enough to withstand political pressure. An invisible side of the odious practice is the growing web of digital trafficking — in 2023, reportedly, online syndicates made up to \$37bn from targets across East and Southeast Asia. A UN report in October revealed that online gangs use AI as a weapon of deception. Pakistan's anti-trafficking measures depend on the speed with which its fractured digital space is restored so that digital slavery rackets, and fraudulent charity enterprises, are successfully thwarted. In short, we must fight fire with fire.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 13, 2025

Terror has no place in our land: COAS praises dismantling of terrorist networks



Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir and other senior military and civil officials are provided a briefing on the security environment, Peshawar, Jan 13.

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir vowed that terrorism had no place in the country and lauded the successful dismantling of the operational capabilities of terrorist outfits active in the country.

Pakistan, particularly Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saw a sharp uptick in terrorism-related incidents in 2024. Terror attacks have increased since the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022, vowing to target security forces and other law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

A statement issued from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) today said the army chief visited Peshawar where he was provided with a comprehensive briefing on the prevailing security situation and the ongoing counter-terrorism operations targeting the TTP. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur were also a part of the briefing.

“As we stand united against the forces of evil, I am immensely proud of the remarkable achievements of our security forces. Through their dedication, courage, and supreme sacrifices, we have successfully degraded the operational capabilities of terrorist organisations, both within our borders and beyond.

“Our forces have relentlessly pursued and eliminated key terrorist leaders, dismantled their infrastructure and neutralised their cells, sending a clear message that terror has no place in our land. This war is ongoing and we would take it to its logical conclusion,” the statement quoted him as saying.

The army chief lauded the “unwavering resolve and unmatched sacrifices” of the military and law enforcement agencies, saying they were instrumental in dismantling terrorist networks and “thwarting their nefarious agenda”.

Gen Munir also highlighted the “relentless efforts” of LEAs in ensuring the safety and security of citizens, foiling numerous attacks, and maintaining peace and order. He highlighted that every operation was a testament to the “courage, professionalism and operational readiness of the security forces, who continue to thwart the evolving threats posed by terrorists”. The ISPR said that the COAS “made it clear that any attempt to disturb the peace of the nation will be met with decisive and overwhelming force”.

“The enemy may try to sow discord and fear, but we will not relent. Hostile elements will be dealt with an iron hand. They will continue to suffer heavy losses, and their capacity to inflict harm will be decimated,” the statement quoted him as saying.

The ISPR further said that the army chief praised the “exceptional morale” of troops, adding that they remained “steadfast in their commitment to safeguard” the nation’s sovereignty. The army chief affirmed that the military and LEAs stood as an “unbreakable force, resolute in their mission to protect the motherland and its people”.

COAS Munir also held meetings with politicians from various parties of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“The participants resolved consensus on the need for one political voice and public support against the scourge of terrorism. The political representatives showed vivid clarity on unflinching support of the armed forces and LEAs in nation’s fight against terror and agreed on the need for a unified front beyond political colours against the extremist philosophy of terrorist groups,” the ISPR concluded.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded this year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 13, 2025

27 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in Balochistan's Kacchi district

Security forces killed 27 terrorists in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Balochistan's Kacchi district, the military's media wing said in a statement.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the IBO was conducted on Sunday based on the reported terrorist presence.

It said security forces "stealthily surrounded and effectively engaged the terrorists' location", as a result of which 27 terrorists were "sent to hell" after an intense exchange of fire.

"Multiple hideouts, including caches of arms, ammunition and explosives, were also destroyed during the operation," the statement added.

According to the ISPR, the slain terrorists were "involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as innocent civilians and were highly wanted by the law enforcement agencies".

"Security forces of Pakistan, in step with the nation, remain determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan," the ISPR concluded.

The raid occurred two days after at least four people were injured in a blast from an improvised explosive device (IED) in Chaman, unknown armed men set a Levies post on fire in Mastung and an assistant commissioner narrowly escaped a bomb attack in Khuzdar on Friday.

According to officials, a powerful explosion occurred in the Station Road area of Chaman, a town near the Afghan border, in the afternoon as a Frontier Corps (FC) truck was passing through the area. Police said unknown people had planted the improvised explosive device on a motorcycle, which was parked on Station Road to target the FC truck carrying security personnel.

The FC truck survived the blast, as the explosion occurred after the truck had passed the point where the IED-laden motorcycle was parked. As a result of the blast, four people who were passing through the area at the time were injured.

Pakistan, particularly Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saw a sharp uptick in terrorism-related incidents in 2024.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded this year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated.

In 2024, the banned militant Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) emerged as a key perpetrator of terrorist violence in Pakistan. The Pak Institute for Peace Studies, an Islamabad-based think tank, noted that BLA-orchestrated attacks caused 225 fatalities, according to the Pakistan Security Report 2024.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 13, 2025

Rise in terrorism linked to Nato's leftover weapons, says ex-caretaker PM Kakar



Former Caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar attends an event at the Institute for Regional Studies in Islamabad.

Former caretaker prime minister and Senator Anwarul Haq Kakar attributed the rise in terrorism to the abundance of Nato weapons left behind in Afghanistan after the US-led mission withdrew in 2021.

Pakistan, particularly Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saw a sharp uptick in terrorism-related incidents in 2024. Terror attacks have increased since the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022, vowing to target security forces and other law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

Making the remarks at a security event hosted in Islamabad, the former caretaker PM attributed the rise in terrorism to terrorists taking possession of Nato's leftover weapons and gadgets. "We cannot afford to leave this region like the Americans left Afghanistan," Kakar was quoted as saying.

He was the chief guest at the event attended by diplomats, think tank representatives, and policy experts.

According to the press release issued by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2024, a detailed report analysing Pakistan's security landscape, was launched at the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad.

"If it takes a century to fight terrorism, Pakistan will do so. This is not just a battle against militants, it's a fight for regional stability," Kakar said, according to the press release.

He continued, "In 2014, terrorism wasn't defeated — it merely relocated to Afghanistan. When the environment became conducive, militants struck back. We must discourage the phenomenon of rationalising terrorism under any pretext."

The press release added that Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of the Institute of Regional Studies, highlighted the collective nature of the challenge, remarking, "Terrorism is a shared threat, and Pakistan should not be left alone to bear the burden. Winning the fight against terrorism requires winning hearts and minds."

PICSS Managing Director Abdullah Khan focused on the strategies employed by militant groups.

"Despite differing ideologies and goals, terrorist groups operating in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are employing similar tactics, such as showing territorial control through public displays," the press release quoted him as saying.

"This raises the question of whether these groups share a common handler. Additionally, their media wings have grown increasingly sophisticated, enhancing their ability to spread propaganda," he noted.

Gul Dad, Director of Research at PICSS, shed light on security challenges along Pakistan's western borders with Iran and Afghanistan.

"The entire western frontier is now under threat from various terrorist groups," he said, according to the release. "Moreover, these militants are attempting to reestablish their presence in urban centres of Punjab and Sindh, which poses a significant danger to national security."

President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Nasir Qureshi emphasised the importance of data-driven insights. "Reports like Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2024 are invaluable for the business community," he said according to the release. "They help us strategise and plan in an uncertain security environment."

The event concluded with a discussion about Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategies and the importance of international collaboration to combat terrorism.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 13, 2025

4 terrorists killed in North Waziristan operation

Security forces killed four terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, the military's media wing said.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), security forces conducted an IBO on Tuesday night in the Spinwam area of North Waziristan "on the reported presence of khwarij".

"During [the] conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged khwarij's location, and after an intense exchange of fire, four khwarij were sent to hell," the statement said.

Security forces also recovered weapons and ammunition from the terrorists who were "actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as target killing of innocent civilians".

Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists, the ISPR said adding, "[The] security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country."

In July, the government, through an official notification, designated the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as Fitna al Khawarij, while mandating all institutions to use the term khariji (outcast) when referring to the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on Pakistan.

On Tuesday, the ISPR reported eight terrorists were killed during two separate operations in KP. Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the TTP broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade, according to a 2024 report issued by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) think-tank.

According to DG ISPR, security forces conducted a total of 59,775 operations last year during which 925 terrorists were killed and 383 officers and soldiers were martyred.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 15, 2025

Boat with 80 passengers, including several Pakistanis, capsizes near Morocco

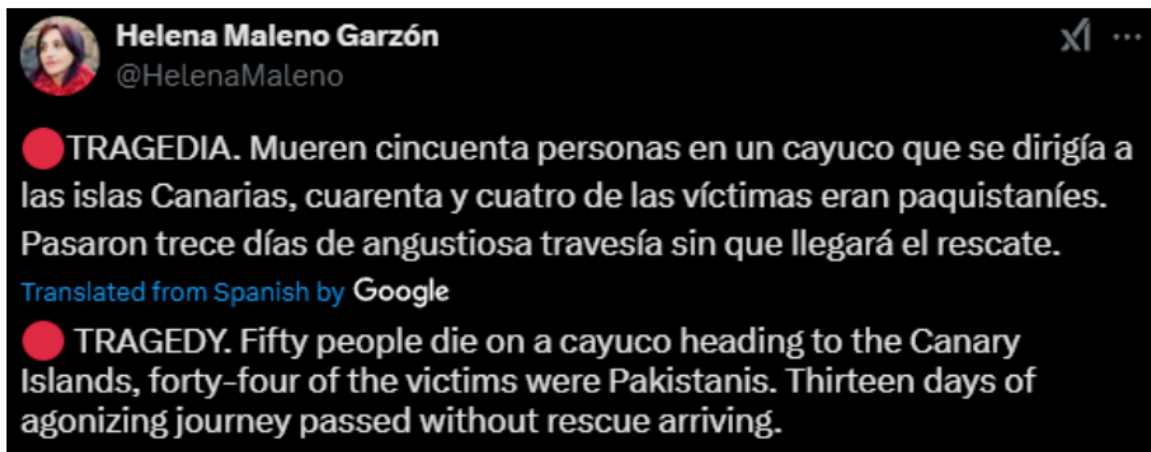
The Foreign Office (FO) said that a boat carrying 80 passengers capsized near Morocco, with over 40 Pakistanis reportedly among the dead.

Migrant rights group Walking Borders said as many as 50 migrants may have drowned in the latest deadly wreck involving people trying to make the crossing from West Africa to Spain's Canary Islands,

Moroccan authorities rescued 36 people a day ago from a boat that had left Mauritania on January 2 with 86 migrants, including 66 Pakistanis, on board, the group said.

Forty-four of those presumed to have drowned were from Pakistan, Walking Borders CEO Helena Maleno said on X.

"They spent 13 days of anguish on the crossing without anyone coming to rescue them," she said.



A FO press release issued today said the Pakistani embassy in Rabat had informed the ministry about the incident.

"Several survivors, including Pakistanis, are lodged in a camp near Dakhla. Our embassy of Rabat is in touch with local authorities. Additionally, a team from the embassy has been dispatched to Dakhla to facilitate the Pakistani nationals and provide necessary assistance."

The FO said its Crisis Management Unit was activated and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar instructed government agencies to extend all possible facilitation to the affected Pakistanis.

It said the CMU could be contacted at (051-9207887) or (cmu1@mofa.gov.pk) while Acting Ambassador Rabia Kasuri and Consular Assistant Noman Ali at the Rabat embassy could be contacted at (+212 689 52 23 65) and (+92 310 2204672), respectively, on WhatsApp.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sought a report on the incident from authorities and said strict action would be taken against those involved in the heinous act of human trafficking.

“No negligence of any kind will be tolerated in this regard. Strong steps are being taken against human trafficking,” he said in a statement.



A statement issued by the PPP said President Asif Ali Zardari also expressed grief on the deaths of over 40 Pakistanis and stressed the need for effective and far-reaching measures to prevent human trafficking.

Asked about what warnings it had received from NGOs regarding a missing boat, Spain’s maritime rescue service said it had learned on Jan 10 about a vessel that had left

Nouakchott in Mauritania and was experiencing problems but it could not confirm if it was the same boat.

The service said it had carried out air searches without success and had warned nearby ships.

Walking Borders said it had alerted authorities from all countries involved six days ago about the missing boat. Alarm Phone, an NGO that provides an emergency phone line for migrants lost at sea, also said it had alerted Spain's maritime rescue service on Jan 12 about a boat in distress.

A record 10,457 migrants, or 30 people a day, died trying to reach Spain in 2024, most while attempting to cross the Atlantic route from West African countries such as Mauritania and Senegal to the Canary Islands, according to Walking Borders.

Citing the Walking Borders' post on X, the Canary Islands' regional leader Fernando Clavijo expressed his sorrow for the victims of the latest wreck and urged Spain and Europe to act to prevent further tragedies.

"The Atlantic cannot continue to be the graveyard of Africa," Clavijo said on X. "They cannot continue to turn their backs on this humanitarian drama."



Last month, several Pakistanis died in a boat capsizing incident in Greece. As per the estimate, more than 80 Pakistanis drowned in the accident, 36 of whom were rescued. The remaining have been presumed dead.

More than 30 Federal Investigation Agency officers have been booked and dismissed from service over their alleged collusion with human smugglers in illegally sending Pakistanis abroad.

In June 2023, hundreds of migrants drowned when an overcrowded vessel capsized and sank in international waters off the southwestern Greek coastal town of Pylos. It was one of the deadliest boat disasters ever in the Mediterranean Sea and there were at least 209 Pakistanis on the boat.

In April of the same year, Pakistanis were among dozens dead as two migrant boats sank in the Mediterranean off different towns in western Libya.

Previously in February 2023, Pakistanis were among 59 people killed when a wooden sailing boat carrying migrants crashed against rocks on the southern Italian coast.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 16, 2025

Soldier martyred, four injured as convoy attacked in KP's Kurram



This combination photo shows contents of an aid truck spilled on the road (L) and an overturned vehicle (R) in Kurram.

One soldier was martyred while four others were injured when a convoy of vehicles carrying food and medical supplies to Parachinar was attacked at the Bagan area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lower Kurram, according to officials.

Clashes stemming from decades-old land disputes claimed at least 130 lives since November, with food and medicine shortages reported due to weeks-long road blockades. A peace agreement was signed on January 1, but the route connecting Parachinar remained blocked. On January 4, a government convoy was attacked near Bagan, injuring Kurram's deputy commissioner and leaving the convoy stranded.

Hangu Assistant Commissioner (AC) Saeed Mannan told Dawn.com today that a convoy comprising 35 vehicles had left from Thall and was on its way to Parachinar when it came under fire.

"The administration is working to bring the situation under control after the attack in Bagan," AC Mannan said.

Meanwhile, Additional Deputy Commissioner Shaukat Ali said: "One soldier was martyred and four were injured in the attack. Three vehicles in the convoy were damaged.

“Action was also taken against the terrorists of the attack. Six terrorists were killed and 10 were injured in the retaliatory action.”

Sajid Turi, a former federal minister from Kurram, said small and large weapons were used in the attack.

Senior police official Sahaib Gul confirmed to AFP that following the attack, 21 trucks retreated from the area while others remained stranded.

Additionally, intense gunfire erupted at two other locations after the incident and it is still ongoing, Gul said, adding that some trucks had “caught fire” as a result of the ambush.

Kurram Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ashfaq Khan told AFP that “firing is ongoing” outside Thall.

A day ago, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the situation in Kurram was “returning to normal” as 25 vehicles of a second convoy carrying essentials reached the district.

On Monday, Adviser to the KP Chief Minister on Information Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif said the demolition of bunkers had begun in Kurram district under the peace agreement.

SOURCE: JANUARY 16, 2025

5 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in KP's Tirah

Five terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Khyber district, the military's media wing said.

A statement from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said an IBO was conducted in the district's general area of Tirah based on the reported presence of terrorists.

It added that the security forces engaged the terrorists and as a result, five, including ringleader Abidullah aka Turab, "were sent to hell" while one was apprehended.

The ISPR said weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the slain who had remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area against the security forces, as well as killing of innocent civilians.

The ISPR added that a sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area. "The security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," it concluded.

The ISPR said a day ago that security forces killed 22 terrorists and injured 18 others in various IBOs across Tirah since December 14.

"Of late, numerous terrorist incidents have occurred in general area Tirah, Khyber district against security forces as well as the innocent civilians, resulting in several casualties," said the statement.

The ISPR added that the IBOs would continue till peace in the area was restored and the terrorists were eliminated.

Armed terrorists, affiliated with various groups, are understood to have gradually moved out of the plains of Tirah valley, taking refuge in vacant houses in the hilly terrain, as security forces fortified their positions in key locations of the valley.

Sources in the region had told Dawn that the situation in most parts of the valley was calm, with no major terror-related incident reported last month.

They said the armed terrorists, who were frequently seen in different parts of Tirah valley, had either returned to Afghanistan or shifted to the bordering Orakzai district, with some opting to "settle down" in partially damaged houses in the peripheral hilly areas to avoid public attention.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan group broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade, according to a 2024 report issued by the Centre for Research and Security Studies think-tank.

According to the ISPR director general, security forces conducted a total of 59,775 operations last year during which 925 terrorists were killed and 383 officers and soldiers were martyred.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 17, 2025

Atlantic tragedy

AS reports emerge of another migrant boat sinking — this time in the Atlantic off the coast of Western Sahara — a fresh approach to the crisis must be urged to prevent more lives from being snuffed out in distant waters.

The boat set sail earlier this month from Mauritania and was reportedly headed to the Spanish Canary Islands. It remained adrift for nearly two weeks. Most of the passengers on board were Pakistani and at least 44 are believed to have perished.

This is the second such incident after a vessel capsized off the Greek coast last month, which reportedly left scores of Pakistanis dead, while a shipwreck in the Mediterranean waters in 2023 claimed 262 Pakistani lives. Following the December tragedy, the state sprang into action, rounding up human smugglers. But far more sustained action is needed to stop this illegal racket, while the only long-term solution lies in addressing the root causes of illegal migration: financial misery and a lack of economic opportunities at home.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, migrant arrivals from Pakistan in Europe have surged since 2023, with economic and political uncertainty fuelling the trend. The IOM says that nearly half of the migrants leaving Pakistan are men aged between 25 and 34; the vast majority hail from central Punjab.

Many migrants are choosing the North African route through Libya and Egypt. From here, they risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean or the Atlantic in rickety vessels in search of a European El Dorado. But, instead of fulfilling their dreams, many of them meet a terrifying end in the sea, or are tortured at the hands of the smugglers.

Dismantling the wide network of human smuggling and trafficking gangs that operate across borders is a challenge but Pakistan must smash these rackets, while officials who facilitate this odious trade must face the law. Better coordination with foreign LEAs is also important. Moreover, as the IOM suggests, awareness must be created in districts with high rates of illegal migration, by “targeting tech-savvy youth”. These young men must be convinced that their risky journeys are not worth it.

Unfortunately, in their desperation, they are unlikely to heed such advice, unless the state shows that it is serious about creating job opportunities for them to live a life of dignity on their own soil.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 18, 2025

Police post attacked, set on fire in Turbat

GWADAR: Armed militants attacked a police post in the Turbat area of Kech district, according to officials. The militants riding motorcycles reached the police check post on the outskirts of Turbat city and carried out the attack. The assailants took the policemen stationed at the post hostage at gunpoint.

After seizing official weapons, radios and other equipment from the police officers, the militants set the check post on fire following a ransacking.

“The check post was completely gutted,” police officials said. They added that soon after receiving information about the attack, police and Frontier Corps personnel rushed to the site, but the attackers had managed to escape.

No casualties were reported in the incident.

Security forces have launched a search operation in the area to apprehend the militants involved in the attack. Earlier in the first week of January, four people were killed and 32 injured in a blast targeting a bus in the suburban area of Turbat, according to the police.

Rabia Tariq, public relations officer for the Balochistan inspector general of police’s office, confirmed the toll to Dawn.com, adding that the nature of the blast was being assessed, but full details would be provided only after an investigation.

She said as per the initial details, a bus going from Karachi to Turbat was targeted in the New Bahman area, adding that the injured were moved to a nearby hospital with five being in critical condition. Ms Tariq said a large number of police and security forces reached the scene and cordoned off the area and further investigations were being conducted regarding the blast.

She said Quetta Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Zohaib Mohsin was also going to Turbat with his family and was caught in the blast. A statement from Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind said SSP Mohsin was slightly injured, along with four of his family.

Mr Rind said the bodies would be sent to their native areas after the necessary formalities and the injured were being provided medical assistance while those seriously injured were being moved to other cities. The banned militant Balochistan Liberation Army group claimed responsibility for the attack.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 19, 2025

Kurram conundrum

THE validity of the claim by state functionaries that the violence in KP's Kurram district stems from a 'tribal dispute' has been severely put to the test by recent events.

After an attack on a convoy in the Bagan area on Thursday led to the loss of security personnel, a counterterrorism operation seems imminent, and the state has prepared plans to shift civilians to safer areas. While tribal disputes over land and water have played a key role in exacerbating tensions in Kurram, the fact is that sectarian groups and terrorist outfits have exploited these differences to establish footholds in the district, as the state has fumbled for responses.

At least two security men were martyred in the convoy attack, which is the second of its kind; an earlier attack had targeted the then Kurram DC, who survived the ambush. In the latest outrage, militants looted the trucks carrying goods to Parachinar, while four drivers have been found dead, with their hands tied and their bodies bearing signs of torture.

Unfortunately, if the state — all institutions, including the centre, the KP government, and the security establishment — had moved with alacrity when violence initially flared up last year, such bloodshed could have been avoided. But it seems that the administration was in denial, letting the Kurram cauldron boil until it was ready to explode, which it certainly has. Now, thousands of people will be displaced as the security forces go after militants. Besides, matters will be complicated by the fact that the local militants — including those fighters allied with the banned TTP and IS-K — have ideological comrades just across the border in Afghanistan.

Sadly, the state took a slothful approach to addressing the underlying land and water disputes which have fuelled conflict. Moreover, the government displayed great callousness by allowing Parachinar to be blocked off from the rest of the country for months following the deadly targeting of a convoy in Lower Kurram in November. This resulted in a grave humanitarian crisis in Kurram's main town, with children and newborns particularly affected due to lack of food and medicine.

But the state took its time to address the 'tribal dispute'. Even the peace pact hammered out by a jirga on Jan 1 has failed to stem the violence, as the recent convoy attacks show, and now a CT operation is being seen as the last resort. If terrorists and sectarian groups — regardless of their confessional affiliations — had been neutralised earlier, we would not be at this juncture today.

Furthermore, the blockade of any region even for a single day should not have been tolerated by the state. The days ahead will tell whether the government succeeds in bringing peace to this forsaken area.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 19, 2025

Five terrorists killed while attempting to infiltrate Balochistan's Zhob

Security forces killed five terrorists who attempted to cross the Afghan border and infiltrate Balochistan's Zhob district, the military's media wing said in a statement.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), security forces detected a group of terrorists attempting to cross the Afghan border in Zhob's Sambaza area in the wee hours of Sunday.

"Own troops effectively engaged and thwarted their attempt to infiltrate. Resultantly, five Khwarij were sent to hell," said the ISPR in the statement, using the term designating members of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have lately been strained due to frequent border skirmishes and Islamabad repeatedly demanding Kabul take action against the TTP for using Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan. Kabul denies the allegations.

The outlawed group has increased attacks on security forces and other law enforcement personnel since breaking a fragile ceasefire agreement with the Pakistani government in 2022.

The ISPR statement reiterated that Pakistan has "consistently been asking [the] interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border".

"[The] interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by khwarij for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan," the statement read.

The military's media wing said that security forces "remain committed to secure its (Pakistan's) borders & eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country".

Last month, security forces killed four terrorists and foiled an infiltration attempt by a group of terrorists trying to cross the Afghan border into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Khyber district, the military said.

The ISPR said troops effectively engaged and thwarted their attempt to infiltrate, and as a result, four terrorists were killed. However, during the intense fire exchange, Sepoy Amir Sohail Afridi, 22, was martyred.

In December, Pakistani fighter jets bombed four locations, said to be camps of the banned TTP, in Afghanistan's eastern Pak-tika province, killing and wounding several suspected terrorists, security officials said.

Sources said that TTP camps in the Murgha and Laman areas of Bernal district were targeted, including one that was used by Sher Zaman alias Mukhlis Yar, Commander Abu Hamza, Commander Akhtar Muhammad and the head of TTP's media arm, Umar Media.

Army Chief General Asim Munir said on January 14 that Afghanistan was a "brotherly neighbour [and] an Islamic country" with which Pakistan "has always wanted" better relations.

"The only difference with Afghanistan is the presence of Fitna al-Khawarij in Afghanistan and the spread of terrorism in Pakistan from across the border, and it will remain so until they remove this issue," the army chief was quoted as saying.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 19, 2025

Security forces neutralise 6 terrorists in Balochistan's Zhob district

Security forces have neutralised six terrorists in Balochistan's Zhob district while they were trying to infiltrate into the province through the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the military's media wing said.

According to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "On [the] night of 22/23 January, movement of a group of khwarij, who were trying to infiltrate through Pakistan-Afghanistan border, was picked up by the security forces in general area Sambaza, Zhob District."

"Own troops effectively engaged and thwarted their attempt to infiltrate. Resultantly, six khwarij were sent to hell," it said, referring to the term used by the state for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The statement added that following the operation, the forces also recovered a large quantity of weapons, ammunition, and explosives.

"Pakistan has consistently been asking the Interim Afghan government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border. The Interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by khwarij for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan.

"Security Forces of Pakistan remain committed to secure its borders & eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country," it said.

Earlier this week, the ISPR revealed that on Jan 11, security forces had killed an Afghan national — involved in terrorism inside Pakistan — during an operation in Zhob.

"The individual was identified as Muhammad Khan Ahmedkhel, Son of Haji Qasim Dawran Khan, resident of Village Bilorai, District Wazekhwa, Paktika Province, Afghanistan," the ISPR had said.

The statement added that Ahmedkhel's body was handed over to Afghan officials on Monday after necessary procedural formalities.

"Such incidents are irrefutable evidence of the involvement of Afghan nationals in terrorist activities in Pakistan," it had added.

Islamabad has consistently voiced concerns that the outlawed TTP uses Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan, asking the Afghanistan government to rein in the group. Kabul denies the allegations.

Owing to the issue, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have lately turned tumultuous, marked by frequent border skirmishes.

In a meeting last week, the political leadership asked the military's top brass to engage with Afghanistan to address security issues.

In an almost four-hour-long meeting with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir, the representatives of several political parties expressed concerns over the prevailing law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However, the COAS pointed out that the Afghan interim rulers had failed to adhere to repeated warnings in the past.

"They don't listen to us," a source quoted the army chief as saying in reply to the suggestion of formal or informal dialogue with the interim Afghan government.

In the face of recurring attacks, security forces have also increased targeted operations in Balochistan and KP.

'Alarming' rise in terrorist attacks

A security report, released earlier this month by the Islamabad-based think tank Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), showed that in 2024, the number of terror attacks reached levels comparable to the security situation in 2014 or earlier.

It said that while terrorists no longer controlled specific territories inside Pakistan as they did in 2014, the prevailing insecurity in parts of KP and Balochistan was "alarming".

It said that over 95 per cent of terrorist attacks recorded in 2024 were concentrated in KP and Balochistan.

KP recorded the highest number of terrorist incidents in the country in 2024, with 295 attacks. Meanwhile, attacks by various outlawed Baloch insurgent groups, primarily the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), saw a staggering 119 per cent increase, accounting for 171 incidents in Balochistan, it said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 23, 2025

Digital dragnet

CONSIDERING the extensive damage it has already wrought to Pakistan's digital aspirations, one would have expected this government to have picked up a few lessons along the way. Not so, it seems.

The latest bright idea from its policymakers is to turn the digital ecosystem into even more of a minefield, with fresh laws that can and very likely will be weaponised against any citizen who refuses to toe state-set lines.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill, 2025, passed by the National Assembly on Thursday, seems aimed at providing new means to state authorities for cracking down on various digital platforms and the 'mischief makers' who use them.

The amendments seek to jail those who spread disinformation for three years, replace the FIA's notorious Cybercrime Wing with a brand-new investigation agency, and establish a new authority with the power to partially or fully block social media platforms that do not comply.

Peca, since its introduction in 2016, has been widely criticised as a black law created mainly to punish dissent. In the eight years since its enactment, it has been used extensively against politicians, journalists, rights activists, and even ordinary political workers to impress the might of the Pakistani establishment onto those who dare to challenge it.

It has condemned those it has touched to incur immense personal, professional and psychological costs, yet not a single meaningful step has been taken to address or even limit its abuse.

Indeed, the country's three biggest political parties have each contributed to either implementing or augmenting Peca to make it even more dangerous than it should have been.

The law's apparent fixation with the criticism of state institutions and their functionaries is indicative of the simple fact that the interests it seeks to protect are not public or national interests, but the vested interests of the country's power elite.

There are examples aplenty of individuals who have been harassed over Peca complaints based on highly frivolous reasons to support digital rights activists' assertion that this law needs to be revised and retrenched, not expanded.

With the country's justice system in a shambles and the authorities time and again displaying an abject lack of regard for due process or human rights, there is a very strong likelihood that the amendments made to Peca by the government can and will be abused by the authorities.

There is no doubt that the rise of social media has greatly complicated some of the challenges faced by modern nation-states and created the potential for unprecedented instability. However, it would be folly to attempt to tackle these challenges with blunt tools like Peca.

The Pakistani state must stop inflicting wounds on itself and learn to resolve its internal issues through social and political means.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 24, 2025

30 terrorists killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa operations

Security forces killed 30 terrorists during three separate operations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media wing said.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the first encounter took place in KP's Lakki Marwat, where an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was carried out on the reported presence of terrorists.

During the operation, security personnel engaged the terrorists, killing 18 of them and leaving another six injured.

The second IBO was conducted in Karak, according to the statement. "In [the] ensuing fire exchange, eight khwarij were effectively neutralised by the security forces," the ISPR said, using the term designating members of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

In the third encounter, security personnel conducted an (IBO) in the Khyber district's Bagh area, where they killed four terrorists and injured two others. "Four khwarij including kharji ring leaders Aziz ur Rehman@ Qari Ismail and Mukhlis were sent to hell, while two khwarij got injured," the ISPR said.

Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain terrorists, who "remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area against the security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians", according to the ISPR.

"Sanitisation operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," the statement concluded.

On January 17, five terrorists were killed in an IBO in the Khyber district's Tirah area, the military's media wing said. A statement from the ISPR said the IBO was conducted based on the reported presence of terrorists.

It added that the security forces engaged the terrorists and as a result, five, including ringleader Abidullah aka Turab, "were sent to hell" while one was apprehended.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022.

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KP recorded the highest number of terrorist incidents in the country in 2024, with 295 attacks. Meanwhile, attacks by various outlawed Baloch insurgent groups, primarily the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), saw a staggering 119 per cent increase, accounting for 171 incidents in Balochistan, it said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 25, 2025

Gag orders

THE proverbial might of the pen is, in reality, unable to hold out against the barrel of the gun.

The new HRCP report, *Harsh Sentences*, charts the extent of capitulation in a dark media landscape where freedom of speech is throttled through covert means, including institutional and legal pressures. A record of the troubling state of freedom of expression during the last two years, it pinpoints “new battlegrounds and unholy alliances” where the noose tightens for selected media outlets.

Over the years, the cyclical template of censorship in Pakistan has become eerily familiar: the cost of speaking truth to power gets heavier, while freedoms peak for voices aligned with state narratives and interests. Although journalists are no strangers to hard seasons, recent times have been particularly dystopian for Pakistan’s mediascape with threats, enforced disappearances, manipulative press advisories, undeclared red lines and mass harassment.

Many maintain that journalist Arshad Sharif’s killing in 2022 combined with suffocating curbs shaped an atmosphere of fear in newsrooms. Widespread loss of trust in mainstream and legacy media was the fallout as powerful stakeholders and extremist groups moved in to exploit the situation by raising a generation of social media consumers with the purpose of amplifying their narratives, irrespective of the truth.

The counterproductive approach adopted by successive governments to force the media to buckle is a sad commentary on Pakistan’s fragile state structure; brutal suppression experienced today exposes how hard it is for the state to make peace with democratic ideals of acceptance and the coevolution of diverse opinions in a modern society.

As noted in the HRCP report, “the space for freedom of expression ... can become constricted due to collusion between the state and the political forces... . In Imran Khan’s heyday... the PTI’s social media machine would specialise in targeting journalists ... labelling them ‘lifafas’... .”

These tactics are tantamount to a slow slicing of media and democracy; depriving news organisations, which uphold editorial integrity, of vital advertising income — the financial ventilator in the current media minefield — is censorship at its most insidious and destructive. Worse, there have been reports that federal and provincial authorities capitulate to establishment directives to withdraw advertisements. It reeks of a

synchronised demolition of independent media outlets through legal and monetary harassment to stagger authentic news broadcasting.

The establishment should know that the federation is weakened by a submissive press. Coercive policies must be abandoned for constitutional freedoms to be inviolable. Amnesty International's latest warning that the proposed changes to the draconian cybercrime laws will strengthen the government's control over Pakistan's heavily monitored digital space, should also serve as a harbinger of terrible global consequences — shrinking rights can be violative of international agreements. Repression portends disaster.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 26, 2025

2 soldiers martyred, 5 terrorists killed in foiled checkpost attack in Balochistan's Qila Abdullah



A combination photo of martyred security personnel Naik Tahir Khan and Lance Naik Tahir Iqbal.

Two soldiers were martyred and five terrorists were killed in a foiled attack on a security checkpost in Balochistan's Qila Abdullah district, the military's media affairs wing said.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said terrorists attempted to attack a checkpost of the security forces in the district's general area of Gulistan on the night between Monday and Tuesday.

"The attempt to enter the post was effectively thwarted by own troops," the ISPR said, adding that this forced the terrorists to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the post's boundary.

It added that five terrorists, including two suicide bombers, were "sent to hell" in the ensuing exchange of fire.

"However, during the intense fire exchange two brave sons of soil, Naik Tahir Khan, 39, and Lance Naik Tahir Iqbal, 26, having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced martyrdom," the statement added.

The ISPR said that a sanitisation operation was being conducted in the area and the perpetrators of the “heinous act” would be brought to justice.

“Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave men further strengthen our resolve.” the statement concluded.

Last week, security forces neutralised six terrorists in Balochistan’s Zhob district while they were trying to infiltrate the province through the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

After the banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022, the country witnessed a sharp uptick in the number of attacks targeting security forces and other law enforcement agencies, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

A security report, released earlier this month by the Islamabad-based think tank Pak Institute for Peace Studies, showed that in 2024, the number of terror attacks reached levels comparable to the security situation in 2014 or earlier.

It said that while terrorists no longer controlled specific territories inside Pakistan as they did in 2014, the prevailing insecurity in parts of KP and Balochistan was “alarming”.

It said that over 95 per cent of terrorist attacks recorded in 2024 were concentrated in KP and Balochistan.

KP recorded the highest number of terrorist incidents in the country in 2024, with 295 attacks. Meanwhile, attacks by various outlawed Baloch insurgent groups, primarily the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Balochistan Liberation Front, saw a staggering 119pc increase, accounting for 171 incidents in Balochistan, it said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 28, 2025

2 soldiers martyred, 6 terrorists killed in KP operation



This combination photo shows Sepoy Muhammad Naeem (L) and Major Hamza Israr (R).

Two soldiers were martyred and six terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the North Waziristan district, the military's media wing said.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said: "On January 29-30 2025, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District on [the] reported presence of khwarij.

"During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly six khwarij were sent to hell," ISPR said, using the term designating members of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

It added that Major Hamza Israr, 29, a resident of Rawalpindi district, and Sepoy Muhammad Naeem, 26, a resident of Naseerabad district "fought gallantly" during the intense exchanges of fire and were martyred.

Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists, ISPR said.

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

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the TTP broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government. With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded the past year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated. The overall fatalities recorded last year were a record nine-year high, and over 66pc more than in 2023. On average, nearly seven lives were lost daily.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 30, 2025

Major among four personnel martyred in North Waziristan



Major Hamza Israr, 29, embraced martyrdom during a security operation in North Waziristan.

NORTH WAZIRISTAN: Four security personnel, including a major, were martyred and 13 terrorists were killed in two different encounters in North Waziristan district, according to the military's media wing and sources.

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

The forces “effectively engaged” the terrorists’ hideout and killed six of them during the crossfire. During the operation, Major Hamza Israr, 29, embraced martyrdom while “leading his troops from the front”. He was a native of Rawalpindi district.

Sepoy Muhammad Naeem, 26, from Naseerabad, Balochistan, “having fought gallantly” also embraced martyrdom. The ISPR statement added that a sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate any remaining terrorists in the area. Ambush In another shootout, two security personnel were martyred and seven terrorists were killed in North Waziristan, according to local sources.

The shootout took place after the terrorists ambushed a security forces’ convoy, which was going from Datta Khel camp to Ghundi post.

No official statement was issued by the ISPR about the attack till the filing of this report.

Since the start of this month, security forces have conducted numerous operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has seen a sharp uptick in terror attacks in the past two years.

Around 30 terrorists, including two ringleaders, were killed and eight others injured in operations earlier this week. According to ISPR, terrorists' hideouts were targeted in Lakki Marwat, Karak and Khyber districts.

As per the military's data, 2024 was the deadliest year in a decade in terms of civil and military casualties.

Most of the 444 terror attacks last year targeted KP.

According to the military, "more than 179 operations" were conducted per day by security forces in 2024. During these operations, a number of "high-value targets and most-wanted terrorists" were killed.

Condolences

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have paid tribute to Major Israr and Sepoy Naeem, who were martyred in North Waziristan, according to APP.

In separate statements, their offices said they praised the bravery and patriotism of martyred soldiers and expressed heartfelt grief over their martyrdom.

President Zardari expressed sympathy with the martyrs' families and prayed that they bear their loss with patience.

"Security forces will continue their operations until terrorists are completely eliminated," the president said, adding the nation's resolve to eliminate terrorists "will remain unwavering".

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said: "We will not let the great sacrifices of the sons of the nation go in vain and will destroy the nefarious intentions of anti-state elements." The government and security forces were mobilised to "completely eradicate terrorism", he added.

The prime minister attended the funeral prayers of Major Israr at the Chaklala Garrison, Rawalpindi, APP reported.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir also attended the funeral.

Following the funeral, the soldier's body was transported to his native area for burial.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 31, 2025

10 terrorists eliminated in KP operations

Security forces have killed 10 terrorists during multiple operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media wing said.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the operations took place a day ago and today with the first encounter in Dera Ismail Khan district's general area of Khulachi where an intelligence-based operation (IBO) was carried out on the reported presence of terrorists.

"During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly, four khwarij were sent to hell," the ISPR said, using the term the state assigned to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

It added that six more terrorists were "successfully neutralised" in four separate encounters in North Waziristan district's general areas of Datta Khel, Hassan Khel, Ghulam Khan, and Mir Ali.

The ISPR said weapons and ammunition were recovered from the killed terrorists who were actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in these areas against the security forces as well as the killing of innocent civilians.

It added that sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country," the ISPR concluded. Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Terror attacks have increased since the banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan group broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government. With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

Equally alarming were the cumulative losses of civilians and security personnel: 1,612 fatalities, accounting for over 63 per cent of the total recorded the past year and marking 73pc more losses compared to 934 outlaws eliminated. The overall fatalities recorded last year were a record nine-year high, and over 66pc more than in 2023. On average, nearly seven lives were lost daily.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 31, 2025