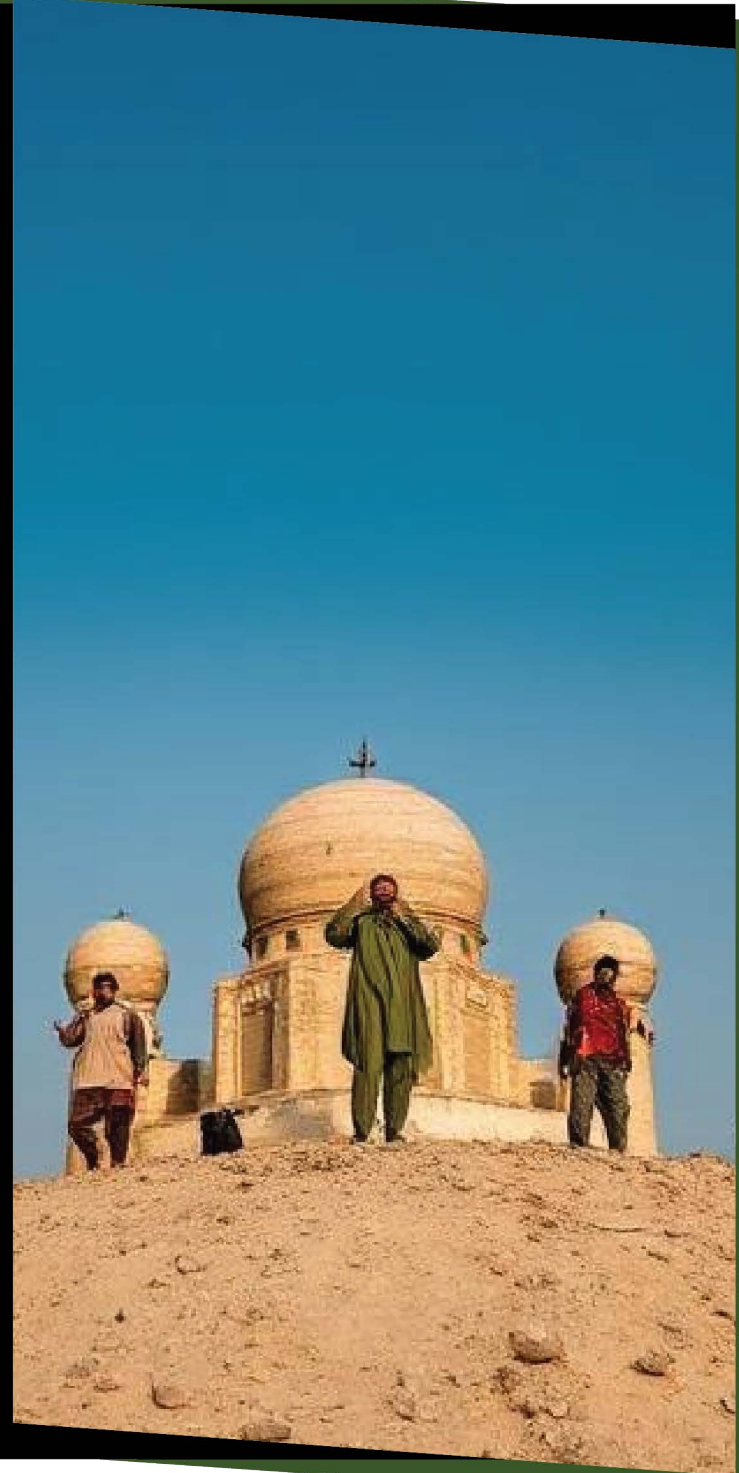


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Counterterrorism ops

THE past year was not a good one where deadly terrorist attacks go, for according to the military's data, 2024 saw the highest number of civilian and military casualties in a decade.

Much of this bloodshed is the handiwork of the banned TTP and other religiously inspired militants, though separatist groups in Balochistan also launched several major attacks. Now it seems that the state has decided to push back hard, going after militants in the worst-affected parts of KP.

Since the start of 2025, numerous operations have been conducted in several KP districts. Two separate attacks occurred in North Waziristan, in which four personnel were martyred on Thursday. As per the military's media wing, 13 terrorists were killed in the encounters. Moreover, around 30 terrorists have been killed in earlier operations. Counterterrorism action was also carried out on Friday.

The military should continue its CT operations till all the affected areas are cleared of militancy. The state has a good idea of the geographical area which needs to be focused on, for the vast number of the 444 terrorist attacks last year occurred in KP. The security forces need to zero in on the districts where militants have established a foothold, and neutralise or evict these malign actors from Pakistani territory. The loss of personnel is particularly tragic, and as this paper has written before, civil and military personnel need to be given better equipment and training that could help save lives in the heat of battle.

The issue of abandoned American weapons in Afghanistan has also come up recently. Earlier, top officials, including the defence minister, had said that TTP fighters were using weapons US forces left behind in Afghanistan after their 2021 retreat. US President Donald Trump has said that "we want the military equipment back" with reference to these weapons.

The Foreign Office has also weighed in on the issue, with the spokesman saying that Pakistan has repeatedly called for ensuring that the weapons "do not fall into the wrong hands". Making sure that –American arms should not end up in the hands of TTP or other terrorists should be a priority for all regional states, as well as the international community. The previous US administration acted hastily by leaving such high-tech gear to be scooped up by terrorists. The current US set-up should do all possible to see that whatever remains of these armaments is retrieved.

To prevent the bloodshed witnessed in 2024, Pakistan will have to act internally, by honing its CT policy to meet the threat, while also maintaining diplomatic pressure on the Afghan Taliban to ensure their soil is not used by anti-Pakistan actors. Together with kinetic operations and supplementary actions, terrorism can be defeated.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 1, 2025

18 soldiers martyred, 23 terrorists killed in Balochistan clearance operations

Eighteen soldiers were martyred, and 23 terrorists were killed in various sanitisation operations in Balochistan, the military's media affairs wing said.

Eleven militants were killed in an operation in Harnai district on Friday, while 12 others died in the initial clash overnight in Kalat district, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

It added that on the night between January 31 and February 1, terrorists attempted to establish roadblocks in the general area of Mangocher in Kalat district.

“On behest of inimical and hostile forces, this cowardly act of terrorism was aimed at disrupting the peaceful environment of Balochistan by targeting mainly the innocent civilians.”

It said that security forces and law enforcement agencies were immediately mobilised, “who successfully thwarted the evil design of terrorists and sent twelve terrorists to hell, ensuring security and protection of the local populace”.

However, the ISPR said that 18 soldiers “made the ultimate sacrifice and embraced martyrdom” during the conduct of operations, adding that sanitisation operations were being conducted and the “perpetrators, facilitators and abettors of this heinous and cowardly act, will be brought to justice”.

It said the security forces remained determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging the peace, stability and progress of the provinces and “such sacrifices of brave soldiers” further strengthened their resolve.

In a follow-up statement, the ISPR said that in the backdrop of the “heinous act of terrorism” in Kalat district, multiple sanitisation operations were being conducted by the security forces throughout the province.

It said one such operation was conducted in Harnai district today where “troops effectively engaged the terrorists as a result of which 11 terrorists were sent to hell. Multiple terrorist hideouts were also busted.”

The ISPR added that thus far a total of 23 terrorists were “sent to hell” in different operations in Balochistan in last 24 hours.

“The sanitisation operations will continue until perpetrators and facilitators of the heinous and cowardly act are brought to justice.”

It added that the security forces of Pakistan, “in step with the nation, are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from Balochistan and Pakistan”. The army chief later visited Quetta to take stock of the prevailing security situation and also met injured soldiers after offering funeral prayers for the martyrs.

The banned Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack, according to AFP.

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Kalat district in a statement on X, expressing “deep sorrow and regret” over the martyrdom of security personnel.

He paid tribute to the soldiers for taking timely action against terrorists and sacrificing their lives for the country, praising their bravery.

“Terrorist elements want to disrupt peace in Balochistan,” he said, adding that security forces would continue their operations to “suppress elements hostile to the country”.



صدر مملکت آصف علی زرداری کی ضلع قلات میں دہشتگرد حملے کی شدید مذمت صدر مملکت کا کارروائی کے دوران سیکورٹی اہلکاروں کی شہادت پر گہرے دکھ اور افسوس کا اظہار صدر مملکت کا بروقت کارروائی کرنے پر شہداء کو خراج عقیدت صدر مملکت کی شہداء کیلئے بلندی درجات، اہل خانہ کیلئے صبر جمیل کی دعا دہشتگرد عناصر بلوچستان کا امن خراب کرنا چاہتے ہیں ملک دشمن عناصر کی سرکوبی کی خاطر سیکورٹی فورسز کی کاروائیاں جاری رہیں گی پاکستانی عوام ملک کا امن خراب کرنے والے عناصر کو مسترد کرتے ہیں پوری قوم دہشتگردی کے خلاف جنگ میں اپنی سیکورٹی فورسز کے ساتھ ہے، صدر مملکت

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Condemning the attack, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the entire nation was determined to thwart the evil intentions of terrorists and paid tribute to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the country.

“Terrorists are the enemies of peace and development of Balochistan. We will continue to fight against the monster of terrorism until it is completely eradicated from the country. The entire nation, including me, stands by its brave forces in the war against terrorism.”



وزیر اعظم محمد شہباز شریف کی ضلع قلات میں دہشتگرد حملے کی شدید الفاظ میں مذمت۔ وزیر اعظم کا دہشتگردوں کے خلاف کارروائی کے دوران ایف سی اہلکاروں کی شہادت پر گہرے دکھ اور رنج کا اظہار۔ وزیر اعظم کی شہداء کی بلندی درجات اور اہل خانہ کیلئے صبر کی دعا۔ مجھ سمیت پوری قوم، دہشتگردوں کے دایاک عزائم کو ناکام بنانے کیلئے پُر عزم ہے۔ قوم و وطن کیلئے جان کی قربانی دینے والے جوانوں کو خراج عقیدت پیش کرتی ہے۔ وزیر اعظم کی دہشتگردوں کو جہنم واصل کرنے پر سیکورٹی فورسز کے افسران و اہلکاروں کی پزیرائی، دہشتگرد بلوچستان کے امن و ترقی کے دشمن ہیں۔ دہشتگردی کی عنقریب کے ملک سے مکمل خاتمے تک اس کے خلاف جنگ جاری رکھیں گے۔ مجھ سمیت پوری قوم دہشتگردی کے خلاف جنگ میں اپنی بہادر افواج کے شانہ بشانہ کھڑی ہے۔
وزیر اعظم

He praised the security forces in a follow-up statement for the successful operations against terrorists.

“The evil intentions of the enemies of peace in Balochistan will never be allowed to succeed. Those who spread mischief in Balochistan are the enemies of the development and prosperity of Balochistan.

“The government will continue to take every possible step for the development of Balochistan. The unwavering determination of the Pakistan Army to protect the people of Balochistan from terrorists is commendable.”

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti vowed that the perpetrators of the “cowardly attack” would be brought to justice.

“There is no place for terrorists in Balochistan. All possible steps are being taken to protect the people and establish peace,” he said while also paying tribute to the security forces for their timely action.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised the security forces and martyrs for their actions against the terrorists.

“We are proud of the bravery of the martyred soldiers and the martyrs are the heroes of the nation. The brave sons became immortal by sacrificing themselves for the homeland and attained the high status of martyrdom. The nation salutes the great sacrifice of the 18 soldiers. We stand with the families of the martyrs. We appreciate the sacrifices of the security forces in the war against terrorism.”



National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq also condemned the attack in Kalat, saying that people rejected elements that disrupted the country’s peace.

“The entire nation stands with its security forces in the fight against terrorism,” Sadiq said.



Uptick in terrorist attacks

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terrorist activities, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

In a separate incident, security forces killed 10 terrorists during multiple operations in KP, the military's media wing said yesterday.

Two soldiers were also 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 earlier this week.

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, FEBRUARY 1, 2025

22 security men martyred in terror attacks

- **Troops kill 11 terrorists in Harnai, 12 in Kalat; multiple hideouts dismantled**
- **18 soldiers embrace shahadat as they foil terrorist attempt to set up roadblocks; four Levies personnel targeted in D.I. Khan**

QUETTA: In major counterterrorism operations, 23 terrorists were killed while 22 security personnel embraced martyrdom in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military and district administration officials said.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations, a security operation was launched following a terrorist attack in Kalat as part of ongoing efforts to eliminate terror threats in Balochistan. Security forces conducted another operation in the Harnai district, where 11 terrorists were killed and multiple hideouts dismantled, the ISPR said.

Earlier, on the night between Friday and Saturday, security forces thwarted an attempt by terrorists to establish roadblocks in the Mangochar area of Kalat district. The military said that 18 paramilitaries lost their lives as they responded to terrorists, while 12 attackers were killed. A police official told AFP on condition of anonymity that a vehicle carrying unarmed border troops “came under gunfire from 70 to 80 armed assailants who had blocked the road”.

In a statement, the ISPR attributed the attack to hostile forces aiming to destabilise Balochistan and disrupt its peaceful environment. It emphasised that ensuing sanitisation operations are underway, and the perpetrators, facilitators and abettors of this heinous act will be brought to justice. The military reaffirmed its commitment to thwarting all attempts to sabotage peace, stability and progress in Balochistan.

The banned Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the Mangochar attack, according to a statement issued by a spokesman of the outlawed organisation.

D.I Khan bomb blast

In a late-night incident, four personnel of the Balochistan Levies and a civilian were martyred in a bomb attack in Dera Ismail Khan, near Balochistan’s border district of Dherani. Pishin Assistant Commissioner Karezat confirmed the incident, adding that a Levies officer was among the deceased. He said the Levies personnel were on their way to recover a stolen truck when their vehicle was targeted by a bomb before reaching the D.I. Khan police station.

The vehicle caught fire after the blast, and all five people, including the four Levies personnel, were burned to death.

The D.I. Khan police are investigating the incident.

Assault condemned

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the terror attack in Kalat and expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of security personnel.

In a statement from the President's Secretariat, he paid tribute to the fallen soldiers, prayed for their ranks in the hereafter and offered condolences to their families.

صدر مملکت آصف علی زرداری کی ضلع قلات میں دہشتگرد حملے کی شدید مذمت۔ صدر مملکت کا کارروائی کے دوران سیکیورٹی اہلکاروں کی شہادت پر گہرے دکھ اور افسوس کا اظہار۔ صدر مملکت کا بروقت کارروائی کرنے پر شہداء کو خراج عقیدت۔ صدر مملکت کی شہداء کیلئے بلندی درجات، اہل خانہ کیلئے صبر جمیل کی دعا۔ دہشتگرد عناصر بلوچستان کا امن خراب کرنا چاہتے ہیں۔ ملک دشمن عناصر کی سرکوبی کی خاطر سیکیورٹی فورسز کی کاروائیاں جاری رہیں گی۔ پاکستانی عوام ملک کا امن خراب کرنے والے عناصر کو مسترد کرتے ہیں۔ پوری قوم دہشتگردی کے خلاف جنگ میں اپنی سیکیورٹی فورسز کے ساتھ ہے، صدر مملکت

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President Zardari observed that terrorist elements wanted to disrupt peace in Balochistan and reiterated that security forces would continue their operations to eliminate enemies of the country.

“The people of Pakistan had rejected those elements who wanted to disturb law and order in the country,” he said, adding that the entire nation supported its security forces in the fight against terrorism.

He paid tribute to security forces for eliminating 23 terrorists in various operations in Balochistan.

وزیر اعظم محمد شہباز شریف کی ضلع قلات میں دہشتگرد حملے کی شدید الفاظ میں مذمت۔ وزیر اعظم کا دہشتگردوں کے خلاف کارروائی کے دوران ایف سی اہلکاروں کی شہادت پر گہرے دکھ اور رنج کا اظہار۔ وزیر اعظم کی شہداء کی بلندی درجات اور اہل خانہ کیلئے صبر کی دعا۔ مجھ سمیت پوری قوم، دہشتگردوں کے ناپاک عزائم کو ناکام بنانے کیلئے پر عزم ہے۔ قوم وطن کیلئے جان کی قربانی دینے والے جوانوں کو خراج عقیدت پیش کرتی ہے۔ وزیر اعظم کی دہشتگردوں کو جہنم واصل کرنے پر سیکیورٹی فورسز کے افسران و اہلکاروں کی یزیرانی۔ دہشتگرد بلوچستان کے امن و ترقی کے دشمن ہیں۔ دہشتگردی کی عفریت کے ملک سے مکمل خاتمے تک اس کے خلاف جنگ جاری رکھیں گے۔ مجھ سمیت پوری قوم دہشتگردی کے خلاف جنگ میں اپنی بہادر افواج کے شانہ بشانہ کھڑی ہے۔ وزیر اعظم

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He commended the bravery of security forces for successfully neutralising the attackers during operations in different areas of the province, including Kalat and Harnai, according to the press release.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also condemned the attack in Kalat and expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of 18 security personnel. He also commended the security forces for eliminating 12 terrorists during the operation. "Terrorists are enemies of Balochistan's peace and development," he stated, reaffirming that the fight against terrorism would continue until it is eradicated from the country.

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti praised the security operations. In a statement, he said security forces, through a timely and effective response, thwarted the malicious intentions of anti-state elements.

"In the past 24 hours, 23 terrorists were killed, which is a testament to the bravery and professionalism of the security forces," he added.

The chief minister paid tribute to martyrs, stating that brave soldiers defended the motherland by sacrificing their lives, and their sacrifices would always be remembered.



SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Out of tune

WITH the start of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's call for dialogue, understanding, mutual respect and cooperation among religious communities is a timely reminder of how much remains to be done to promote communal tolerance in the country.

“The groundbreaking Interfaith Harmony Policy and Strategy of Religious Tolerance are now in motion, targeting hate speech at its core, safeguarding every temple, church, and shrine,” he said, while admitting that challenges remained. And these challenges are considerable. It is no secret that constitutional assurances of freedom for religious groups to practise their faith and of protection for the life and liberty of all citizens ring hollow for many of Pakistan's religious minorities, who include Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis among others, forming only 4pc of the population. They exist on the peripheries of society, with many at risk of being targeted by divisive zealots with disruptive agendas and actions.

For centuries, coexistence among different faith groups was hardly considered novel. But in the present times, thanks to the space ceded to radical elements, belonging to a minority sect or group can be a sombre presage of severe consequences.

Pakistan's communally charged situation can hardly be said to be an unplanned phenomenon; with different rulers at different times exploiting religion to promote their own agendas. This has come back to haunt the country in the form of not only religiously inspired militancy but also vigilantism in society, the misuse of blasphemy laws, forced conversions, desecration of religious places, etc.

Such activities can often be traced to sinister purposes of control and settling personal scores. Small wonder then that episodes such as the torching of Christian neighbourhoods and mob justice for a blasphemy accused are not uncommon. For even marginal healing to begin, the process of accountability must be set in motion for those who spew bigotry and encourage violence from the pulpit. Harmony requires prosecuting and punishing hate-mongers, and formulating inclusive policies with measures to curtail venomous narratives. Pakistan, as an economic backwater, needs social cohesion for development and political agency. The state should adopt a more aggressive approach to reverse the tide of zealotry and establish a platform for leaders from different faiths to break the social impasse.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Terror attacks, security operations surged in January

ISLAMABAD: The country witnessed a sharp increase in terror attacks in January 2025, surging by 42 per cent compared to the previous month.

According to a data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), a think tank, at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities, including 35 security personnel, 20 civilians and 36 militants.

Another 117 individuals suffered injuries, including 53 security forces personnel, 54 civilians and 10 militants.

The report highlighted an intensified counterterrorism campaign by security forces, which led to elimination of at least 185 militants in January, making it the second deadliest month for militant casualties since 2016.

The highest number of militants killed in a single month since 2016 was recorded in December 2024, when security forces neutralised 190 militants. The combined toll of militant attacks and security operations in January stood at 245 fatalities, comprising 185 militants, 40 security forces personnel and 20 civilians.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) remained the worst-affected province, followed by Balochistan. In KP's settled districts, insurgents carried out 27 attacks, resulting in 19 fatalities, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and two militants.

The tribal districts of KP (erstwhile Fata) witnessed 19 attacks, leading to 46 deaths, including 13 security personnel, eight civilians, and 25 militants.

Balochistan also experienced a surge in militant activity, with at least 24 attacks, which claimed 26 lives, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and nine militants.

In Punjab, two militant attacks were reported, leaving one security official injured. On the last day of January, militants launched a major assault on a police check post in DG Khan's Jhangi area, but security forces repelled the attack without any casualties. Sindh and the federal capital, Islamabad, each witnessed one attack, though neither resulted in fatalities.

The month also saw two suicide bombings, both in Balochistan. The banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for one, while the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army took credit for the other.

Additionally, the report observed a concerning spike in kidnappings, with militants abducting at least 37 individuals.

Of these, 22 were taken in five incidents across KP's Lakki Marwat and Tank districts, while 15 were kidnapped in North and South Waziristan. The surge in abductions in southern KP reflects a deteriorating security situation in the region, it stated.

Meanwhile, security forces intensified operations across KP and Balochistan, eliminating 67 militants in the tribal districts of KP (erstwhile Fata), 71 in its settled areas, and 47 in Balochistan. Counterterrorism raids were reported in multiple parts of both provinces as authorities sought to curb the growing militant threat.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 3, 2025

Kurram fragility

JUST as the people of Kurram began to see some relief in the form of convoys laden with essentials reaching Parachinar and other parts of the district cut off from the rest of the country due to bloodshed, fresh violence on Friday showed that calm in the tribal district can be shattered very easily.

Local authorities had intervened to keep the peace after two men were injured in a firing incident. Yet even the government peacemakers came under fire, highlighting the volatile state of affairs in Kurram.

Assistant Commissioner Saeed Manan, who was trying to mediate, was shot but is, thankfully, out of danger. However, a policeman, Ashiq Hussain, later succumbed to his wounds. This is not the first time officials and security men have come under attack.

Last month, the then deputy commissioner Javedullah Mehsud survived a murderous attack in Bagan, while days later militants martyred a number of security men. A 'limited' counterterrorism operation was launched thereafter, but as the latest attack shows, much more needs to be done to pacify Kurram.

Admittedly, the Kurram imbroglio is complicated, where tribal disputes over land and water have become intertwined with long-running sectarian feuds. There is also a geopolitical and security angle, as many of the Sunni militant groups active in the area are on good terms with the Afghan Taliban, while Shia militants linked to the Zainabiyoun Brigade maintain a strong presence in Kurram.

Bloodletting has been continuing since last year, and matters exploded after a convoy was attacked in November. Since then, attacks and counterattacks have been frequent.

The state has made several — some would say belated — attempts to quell the violence, the most significant coming in the form of a peace deal hammered out on New Year's Day. But clearly, it will take full commitment by all state institutions, as well as the earnest cooperation of local tribes, to make the agreement work.

A grand jirga was held on Friday in Kohat to discuss the Kurram situation. At this gathering, the KP government spokesperson seemed upbeat about peace prospects. While the state's efforts to contain bloodshed are appreciable, it will take more than words to bring lasting calm to Kurram.

At the Kohat Jirga, the KP spokesman said it was essential that “miscreants” involved in troublemaking be handed over to the authorities. He also said a relief package for Kurram was being finalised. Both these issues are important.

Those involved in violence must face the law, while those who have suffered during the conflict must be compensated financially. Moreover, the closure of roads in Kurram cannot be tolerated, and all thoroughfares should be made safe for travel. Efforts to engender reconciliation and forgiveness between Kurram’s tribes must also continue.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 3, 2025

How new cybercrime law puts digital rights at stake

UNLAWFUL CONTENT DEFINED IN PECA	
Before amendment	After amendment
<p>37(1). Unlawful online content — The authority shall have the power to remove or block or issue directions for removal or blocking of access to information through any information system if it considers it necessary in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court or commission of or incitement to an offence under this act.</p>	<p>2R(1). Unlawful or offensive online content — The Authority shall have the power to issue directions to a social media platform for removal or blocking of online content if such online content—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) is against the ideology of Pakistan, etc (b) incites the public to violate the law, take the law in own hands, with a view to coerce, intimidate or terrorise public, individuals, groups, communities, government officials and institutions (c) incites public or section of public to cause damage to governmental or private property (d) coerce or intimidate public or section of public and thereby preventing them from carrying on their lawful trade and disrupts civic life (e) incites hatred and contempt on religious, sectarian or ethnic basis to stir up violence or cause internal disturbance (f) contains anything obscene or pornographic in contravention of any applicable law (g) is known to be fake or false or there exist sufficient reasons to believe that the same may be fake or false beyond a reasonable doubt (h) contains aspersions against any person including members of the judiciary, armed forces, Majlis-i-Shoora (Parliament) or a provincial assembly (i) promotes and encourages terrorism and other forms of violence against the state or its institutions.

Unlawful content defined in Peca law.

THE acronym “Peca” has been all over the news lately, and many would be scratching their heads, wondering if this brouhaha is something you — the reader — should take seriously. The short answer is yes, you should be concerned. Very concerned.

Peca is short for the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, the law that governs online spaces in Pakistan. The reason you’ve been hearing about it non-stop is because last week, the government made wholesale changes to the law that make it very easy to prosecute people whose opinions may differ from the official line.

In the state’s view, the move was necessary to counter the menace of “fake news” and save people from online crimes, but it’s never quite that simple.

Lawyers, journalists and rights experts say the amended law gives the authorities extraordinary powers and violates the fundamental right to free speech, guaranteed by the Constitution.

Although it's mainly journalists protesting against the amended Peca law for now, it would be foolish fallacy to think the threat is limited to one community or profession alone.

Every Pakistani who uses social media now has to be really watchful of their digital footprint. The vague language used in the law has expanded the definition of crimes in such a way that any individual could face punitive action for what they might say or do — even inadvertently — on the internet.

This article aimed to break down the complex jargon used in the 18-page draft and explain what the provisions mean how they could affect you and those around you.

Unlawful content

The most holistic change in the law brought about through the amendments is the expanded list of unlawful content. Section 2R added to the law through the amendment, states that content posted online would be deemed unlawful if it:

- “(a) is against the ideology of Pakistan, etc.;
- (b) incites the public to violate the law, take the law in own hands, with a view to coerce, intimidate or terrorize public, individuals, -groups, communities, government officials and institutions;
- (c) incites public or section of public to cause damage to governmental or private property;
- (d) coerce or intimidate public or section of public and thereby preventing them from carrying on their lawful trade and disrupts civic life;
- (e) incites hatred and contempt on religious, sectarian or ethnic basis to stir up violence or cause internal disturbance;
- (f) contains anything obscene or pornographic in contravention of any applicable law;
- (g) is known to be fake or false or there exist sufficient reasons to believe that the same may be, fake or false beyond a reasonable doubt;
- (h) contains aspersions against any person including members of Judiciary, Armed Forces, Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) or a Provincial Assembly; or
- (i) promotes and encourages terrorism and other forms of violence against the State or its institutions.“

While most of these provisions specifically state the nature of the content that will be deemed unlawful, two of the (g) and (h) need closer scrutiny.

The provision (g) vaguely describes “fake news”, leaving much to interpretation with the use of words like “sufficient reasons to believe” and “beyond a reasonable doubt”.

The provision (h) is even more consequential because of how the terms “aspersion” and “person” are defined in the new law.

Section 2(iiiia) added to the law defines aspersion as “spreading false and harmful information which damages the reputation of a person”. Under the amended Peca law, a “person” is “a legal or natural person and includes a body politic or corporate”.

It essentially means that anything said against a natural person (human) or even public and private companies could be deemed unlawful and liable to be punished. For example, if a person criticises their electricity company for loadshedding, it could also be construed as “aspersion”.

Lawyer Abdul Moiz Jaferii tells Dawn that the previous PTI government also tried to introduce a similar amendment in Peca in 2022, but the law was struck down by the Islamabad High Court.

Social media platforms

The amended Peca law has also redefined the term “social media platform”. It says that a social media platform means two things:

“(a) any person that owns, provides or manages online information system for provision of social media or social network service;

(b) a website, application or mobile web application, platform or communication channel and any other such application and service that permits a person to become a registered user, establish an account, or create a public profile for the primary purpose of allowing the user to post or share user-generated content through such an account or profile or enables one or more users to generate content that can be viewed, posted or shared by other users of such platform but shall not include the licensees of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.”

There was no definition for social media platforms in Peca before the amendment. However, the new definition of this term includes apps like Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat, etc and “communication channels” used to access these platforms, including VPNs.

This seems like an effort to provide legal cover to authorities if they decide to block VPNs in future.

Over the past few months, PTA and the federal government have repeatedly talked about blocking VPNs, which are being widely used since X was banned in February 2023.

However, the government was told that Peca only allows for online content to be blocked and there was no law to block communication channels used to access content. Now there is.

Fake news

In Section 26A of the amended law, fake news is defined as any information about which a person “knows or has reason to believe to be false or fake and likely to cause or create a sense of fear, panic or disorder or unrest”.

Any person found guilty of spreading such information could be sentenced to up to three years in prison or fined up to Rs2 million, or both.

As per the law, the victims of “fake and false information” can file a complaint with the Social Media Protection and Regulatory Authority (SMPRA), one of the four new bodies being set up under this law.

In legal jurisprudence, a complainant is usually the aggrieved party who is directly impacted by the committed crime. However, Section 2(via) of the amended law says that for all offences outlined in Peca, a complainant can be the victim or “an individual having substantial reasons to believe that the offence has been committed”.

Legal experts say that the provision allowing third parties—who are neither the victim nor the accused—to file complaints was liable to be misused as these complaints have been repeatedly used to lodge frivolous FIRs, mostly for political witchhunts and settling scores.

Another punitive action outlined under the amended law is that disseminating information “believed to be fake” would be a non-bailable, non-compoundable and cognisable offence.

Compoundable offences are the ones where victims and accused are not allowed to reach a compromise. For such crimes, punishment cannot be commuted or reduced on the premise of a compromise, says Mr Jaferii, the legal expert.

A cognisable offence is a crime for which the police don’t need a warrant to arrest the accused.

It essentially means that any person accused of sharing “fake information” will be arrested without a warrant, will not be granted bail for as long as the trial goes on and cannot settle the matter out of court.

Four new authorities

SMPRA is the first of the four bodies to be set up under the new law. It will, among other things, “regulate” unlawful or offensive content on social media; enlist, block or issue guidelines to social media platforms; hear complaints in case of the violation of Peca; and issue directions to block or remove unlawful or offensive content. The provision seems to be a renewed attempt to force social media companies to register with local authorities.

The SMPRA will have nine members, including a chairperson, who will be appointed by the federal government. They will pass orders to remove or block “fake and false” content within 24 hours of complaint.

However, the chairperson will also have “exclusive powers” to immediately block content in case any situation requires immediate action. How the urgency of the situation would be determined has not been defined in the law.

However, there are serious concerns over the body’s role as an independent regulator, as Section 20 states that it will be “binding on the authority” to block or take down content at the federal government’s request.

The language of Section 20 implies that SMPRA “will be a subservient body to the federal government” rather than act as an independent regulator, says Mr Jaferii.

The amended Peca has also provided legal “indemnity” to any decision made by the authority or federal government as it cannot be challenged in courts.

However, Mr Jaferii believes this is a “standard boilerplate clause” which courts often choose to ignore if the complaint alleges abuse of process, excess of jurisdiction or malicious intent.

The Social Media Complaint Council will be the second organisation to come into being under this law to “receive and process complaints” against the violation of Peca. As of now, there is no clarity in the law as to how the function of this council would be different from the SMPRA.

Another body to be formed under the law is the Social Media Protection Tribunals. It will have three members: a chairman who should be qualified to be a high court judge, a journalist and a software engineer, all appointed by the federal government.

“Any person aggrieved by any decision of the [SMPRA] may prefer an appeal before the tribunal,” says the law about the tribunal’s function.

The decision given by the tribunal can only be challenged in the Supreme Court. This provision effectively ruled out the possibility of filing appeals with the high courts, which is cheaper and more accessible.

Mr Jaferii says the provision would only make the appellate process “more arduous and expensive”.

The fourth body to be set up under the law will be the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency, only a month after the government disbanded this agency.

As per the law, NCCIA will replace FIA’s Cyber Crime Wing and conduct “investigation and prosecution of the offences” specified in Peca.

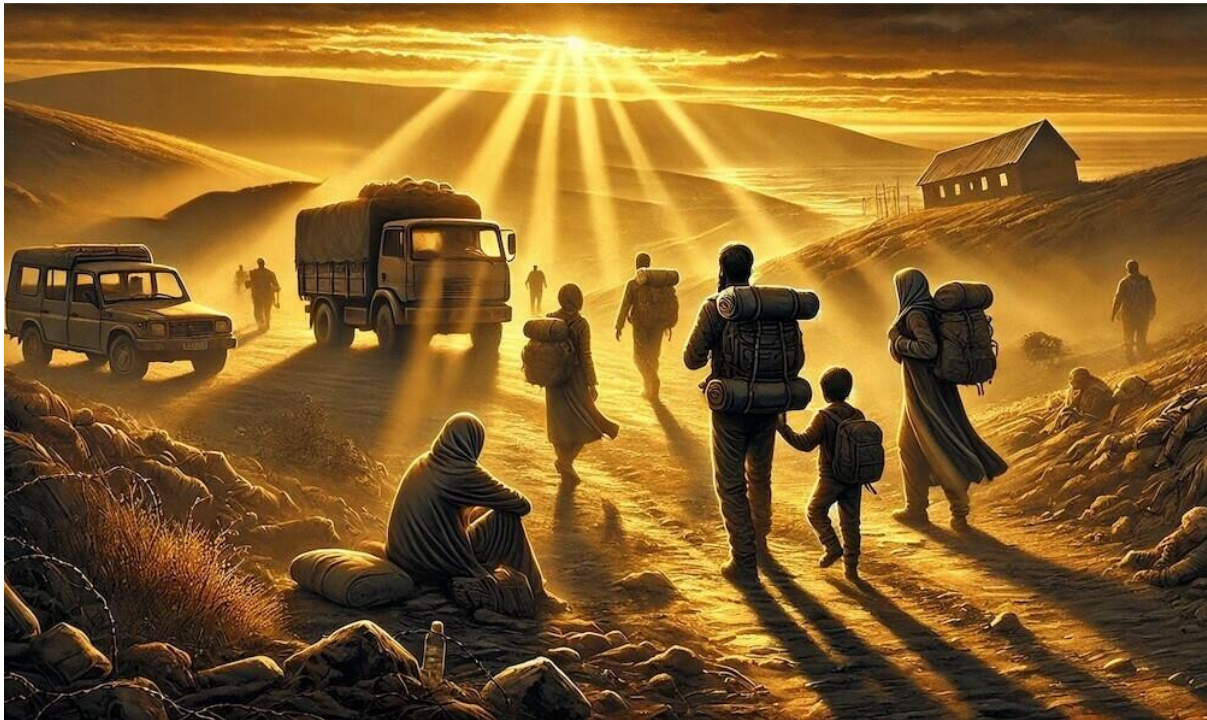
Ammar Jaffri, who used to head FIA’s National Response Centre for Cyber Crime, says creating multiple authorities to deal with a specific nature of crime would result in conflict and redundancy.

He explains that a number of existing organisations, like the National Telecommunication and Information Technology Security Board, National Computer Emergency Response Team of Pakistan and PTA, have more or less similar functions.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 3, 2025

Dying for a dream: Pakistan's migrant crisis from GT Road to Europe

UMAR RIAZ



Last month, around 50 Pakistanis died on a migrant boat, while trying to cross the Atlantic Ocean illegally to reach Europe in what has been called the Atlantic boat tragedy.

The tragedy is not the first one. In June 2023, 300 hundred Pakistanis drowned in a migrant boat disaster. The boat capsized off the coast of Greece, with Italy being the intended destination. Before that, seven Pakistanis died off the coast of Libya in April 2023, in an incident that claimed 57 lives.

Migrant smuggling has grown more frequent and dangerous in the last few years, with the trend impacting both the country's reputation and the lives of those caught in it. The UK has faced a surge in migrant inflows across the channel, while the USA and Australia have become favoured destinations in recent years.

But why are people choosing to risk their lives for these proverbial greener pastures? And who is benefitting from the human trafficking?

The double threat

There are two parts to the problem. First, the number of migrants attempting the journey is steadily increasing, as seen in the rising figures from source countries. For example, the migrant number in Italy has almost doubled in just one year, from 50,000 to 80,000. A 2023 study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Union (EU) found that 24,000 Pakistanis entered EU countries illegally over the past three years. Pakistan now ranks fifth among countries sending migrants to Europe, with a particularly alarming 280 per cent surge in 2022 alone.

The entire smuggling operation has a massive financial dimension too. The standard ‘rate’ for landing in Europe is reportedly \$11,926 (equivalent to Rs3.3 million). For the 24,000 Pakistanis who made the journey, this translates into the value of enterprise to be Rs80 billion. One must not forget that this fee only covers transportation — smugglers do not guarantee any employment or settlement; they simply take responsibility for the journey itself. With such enormous sums involved, it’s no surprise that more players are being drawn into the smuggling trade.

The other major concern is the growing reliance on perilous sea routes off the North African coast. The same UNODC-EU study found that nearly half of all migrants were smuggled via the eastern and central Mediterranean sea routes.

The year 2024 saw a devastating loss of life in the Mediterranean, with over 2,200 people either dead or missing — nearly 1,700 of them on the central Mediterranean route alone. Pakistan, as per reports, is the fifth largest contributor to these sea-based attempts. One can speculate that the true scale of fatalities of Pakistani migrants is in the hundreds, if not higher.

Pull and push factor framework

Migrant smuggling must be understood within the pull-push framework. Pull factors are the forces that attract people to greener pastures — perceived better opportunities, often in wealthier countries — while push factors are the conditions that drive individuals to flee their home countries. In this context, pull and push factors can also be understood as the demand and supply sides of migrant smuggling. Pull factors drive the demand for smuggling services, while push factors shape the supply, both determining the dynamics of migration.

On the pull side, the stark contrast in earnings between Europe and home countries draws many, alongside the lure of a confirmed path to citizenship, regardless of how one arrives. Lenient human rights policies in European countries further attract migrants, as does the relatively high retention rate — meaning that once people arrive, they’re less likely to face

deportation. The success stories of those making it despite the odds fuel further aspirations, while kinship links along the GT Road ensure a sense of security for migrants once they reach their destinations.

On the push side, socio-economic competition in districts along the GT Road exacerbates local tensions, driving many to seek a way out. This is compounded by the growing efficiency of smuggling networks, alongside the emergence of new sea routes such as the eastern and central Mediterranean paths, and new destinations such as Portugal and Romania. The ease of access to transit points in countries like the UAE, Egypt, and Morocco makes these routes all the more appealing. Meanwhile, policy ambiguity in Pakistan further complicates the situation, offering no clear solution for those desperate to leave.

As a result, migrants are increasingly turning to high-risk, high-reward sea routes, particularly those off the North African coast, which offer the shortest distance to Italy and Spain. The lines between refugees and migrants are blurring as both groups join forces to reach Europe, with Italy and Spain emerging as the primary destinations. The migration patterns are concentrated in just a few districts — Gujrat, Mandi Bahauddin, Sialkot, and Gujranwala — along the GT Road, where people continue to make the perilous journey despite the looming threat of tragedy at sea.

Any effort to stem the flow of migrants and prevent smuggling must first acknowledge and address the underlying push and pull factors. Before exploring potential solutions, we have to look at what has been done and why has it not worked. To do so, we must dispel some of the myths surrounding migrant smuggling, as these misconceptions often hinder effective policy and action that can truly make a difference.

Myths of migrant smuggling

The first myth is that migrant smuggling is on the rise due to poverty. The region that supplies most of the smuggled migrants — the GT Road belt, comprising Gujranwala, Sialkot, Gujrat, Mandi-Bahauddin, and Jhelum — is not the poorest, but rather home to some of the wealthiest in Pakistan. The area boasts a thriving agricultural economy (except for Jhelum), along with cottage industries and a professional class of government servants, lawyers, doctors, and more.

A recent report by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), commissioned by the National Commission for Human Rights of Pakistan (NCHR), titled *Perilous Journeys: Unravelling Irregular Migration from Pakistan*, reveals key insights about these five GT Road districts, including Faisalabad. The unemployment rate in all five districts is under 2pc, and multi-dimensional poverty is less than 20pc, except for Mandi-Bahauddin, where it reaches 31pc.

The issue, therefore, isn't poverty but economic competition. People are being driven out by the fierce competition for limited resources and opportunities, seeking greener pastures abroad. Homegrown smuggling networks exploit this economic tension in these districts to facilitate migration.

The idea that migrants involved in smuggling are poor and powerless is another misconception. Anyone able to pay \$12,000 (or Rs3.2 million) for the journey to Europe is hardly poor. In fact, most migrants finance their smuggling through the sale of valuable assets at their disposal. In the GT Road region, agricultural land is being increasingly commercialised, fetching millions per acre. Even the most basic agricultural land in some areas can sell for around Rs7 million per acre. This amount is enough to send two people to Europe. It's a common practice: sell an acre of land and send two sons abroad. As long as land remains available, the outflow to Europe will continue.

An interesting side note: who is purchasing the land from prospective migrants? Since it's nearly impossible for outsiders to buy agricultural land, the buyers are often the families of already-settled migrants in Europe — who have become the nouveau riche of GT Road villages and the role models for others. The real driving force behind this migration is competition — a race fuelled by envy and jealousy. Those left behind feel their lives are miserable in comparison and will go to any length to keep up with their neighbours.

It is also important to note that the belief that migrant smugglers will be deterred by arrests and prosecution is unfounded.

After every boat tragedy, a flurry of arrests occurs across the GT Road, accompanied by announcements of severe punishments. Hundreds of people are apprehended — some genuinely involved, others not so much — but despite these efforts, enforcement does not appear to work as a deterrent as evidenced by the numbers reported by the European border agency, Frontex.

The clear evidence of the lack of deterrence lies in the repeated boat tragedies, one after another, despite mass arrests following each incident. There are two primary reasons for this. First, recidivism among human smugglers is very low, meaning new criminals constantly enter the lucrative trade. Second, the time spent in jail is minimal, rarely more than a few weeks, which does little to deter smugglers when the profit margin per case can reach millions. And one must not forget that agents in Pakistan face minimal risk since their role is limited to making referrals to counterparts in North Africa.

The threat of danger and risk of death do not discourage the migrants, which is perhaps the most tragic myth. People living along the GT Road are well aware of the risks, seeing the bodies of the deceased arriving in villages, and knowing that many more remain missing. Yet, they are not deterred, as evidenced by the continued flow of migrants. This

is especially striking given that the people in these areas are not as poor as often perceived, and they face tough socio-economic competition.

The question remains: why do they continue to take such high risks?

The success rate of making it to Europe remains relatively high, which keeps hope alive. Moreover, large family sizes fuel the desire to migrate. Many families have four or five sons, and these young men feel left behind when they see their neighbours building lavish homes and driving expensive cars. The IOM report cited earlier reveals that the average family size in the GT Road districts is 6.5, which provides ample room for families to take the risk of sending members abroad in the hopes of bettering their futures.

While deportations have risen, they do little to dissuade those who are willing to take such extreme risks for a shot at a better life. According to a report presented in the Pakistani Senate, 154,000 Pakistanis were deported between 2021 and 2023 — the majority from Gulf countries and Turkey. Deportation, however, is seen as a mild risk compared to the dangers of the journey itself. Anecdotal evidence suggests that deportees often return with even greater resolve, determined to try again and do it better, having glimpsed the greener pastures.

After every tragedy or wave of deportations, the same question of how these migrants left Pakistan in the first place resurfaces. Those who travel via land routes leave no official record, but those smuggled through the sea routes from Africa or the Balkan route via Turkey almost always exit Pakistan by air. This leads to intense scrutiny of immigration authorities, who are expected to carry out some quick profiling and identify potential smuggled migrants within mere minutes.

In fact, airports are an ineffective filter, and profiling can hardly work given the constraints of time, urgency, and sensitivity. Most smuggled migrants travel through Gulf states, with over 50 daily flights connecting Pakistan to key transit hubs. Excessive profiling would create unnecessary hurdles for legitimate travellers while doing little to curb smuggling. Instead, migrants may simply shift to religious pilgrimage flights — adding a slight cost but not enough to deter them.

What does not work?

We have seen what does not work. Enforcement does not seem to be working. Random arrests and prosecutions have proven ineffective over the past three years. Prosecution fails because cases are complaint-driven, with the complainants primarily interested in recovering their money, rather than securing punishment. It's also important to distinguish between fraud and smuggling; most complaints are related to the former. Increased

profiling at airports also doesn't work; it just creates unnecessary hurdles for legitimate travellers.

Prevention measures, such as awareness campaigns and public service messages, also fall short. One can establish as many migrant resource centres as one likes, but the GT Road operates on its own resources. People along the GT Road are well aware of the risks of illegal migration, yet they remain determined. Even resettlement programmes for deportees fail when those deported have had a taste of what life could look like in Europe and continue to be pursued by agents.

We have also seen that deportations are too few and too lenient to be effective and are politically contested as well. In 2015-16, Pakistan even refused several deportations from Europe. If these measures become too punitive or overwhelming, the country may once again reject them altogether.

What will work then?

The push-pull factors framework can be instrumental in creating opportunities while minimising these factors at the policy and enforcement levels.

Legal migration to Europe is largely restricted to students and a few professionals, while the majority of illegal migrants end up in unskilled jobs such as waiters, taxi drivers, or grocers after upgrading their skills. There is growing demand for semi-skilled workers, and the onus is on destination countries to divert the legal migration based on the proportion of existing diaspora. The importance of kinship-based ties as a pull factor cannot be overstated, as migrants often rely on family members who are ready to receive them. Sponsorship schemes, combined with a financial guarantee, can encourage migrants to pursue legal routes with their relatives as sponsors. Canada, for example, is promoting such migration, which is a win-win for all parties involved.

At the source level, the focus must shift from illegal to irregular migration. Countries like the UK, Australia, and Japan have implemented models where illegal migration is transitioned into irregular migration. While unconventional, this approach has shown promising results in reducing illegal migration by offering a transitional pathway.

Investment-based migration presents substantial opportunities. Much of the diaspora engages in small- and medium-sized businesses. The GT Road, a major commercial hub with considerable assets, could benefit from such investment. Many European countries offer investment opportunities that may appear costly, but compared to what migrants typically pay, the investment is far more sustainable and could absorb more people in the long term. Currently, the government discourages the outflow of capital, which ends up

flowing through informal channels like hundi-hawala to the UAE. Why not allow this capital to be invested in Europe, creating opportunities for employment?

Finally, the certification and standardisation of skills have been an elusive dream. Our skills are not universally recognised or accepted. For instance, many Pakistanis work abroad as chefs, mechanics, barbers, and tradesmen but are not formally certified. Nursing is a high-demand field where we could meet supply, but little progress has been made there.

Enforcement level interventions

The challenge of distinguishing between victims and offenders must be addressed. Currently, the law ensures the “non-criminalisation of smuggled migrants”. But is it fair to exempt an adult who knowingly pays to cross borders illegally? At the same time, illegal border crossings and the use of fake documents remain offences under statutes. Criminalising migrants outright is not advisable as it would discourage them from filing complaints. A more effective approach would be to introduce punitive measures for repeat offenders, such as mandatory sureties or attendance requirements for deportees, to prevent repeated attempts. While a first-time offender might be considered a victim, repeated violations must have consequences.

Finance is the key to dismantling organised crime. While the law defines organised criminal groups (OCGs), it lacks a clear mechanism to combat them. Smuggling syndicates generate an estimated Rs40-50 billion annually, with the cash laundered into property or transferred abroad through transit networks. Hardly any of this wealth is detected or seized.

Parallel financial investigations into money laundering and the freezing of crime proceeds can be one long-term solution. These must be supported by reactive financial intelligence from financial institutions and the financial monitoring unit. Human smugglers can only be deterred when their financial networks are disrupted, and prosecutions will be effective only if backed by clear financial evidence and money trails.

Migrant smuggling is an organised crime, yet it is often treated as a failed transaction between individuals. Investigations and prosecutions must go beyond complaints and applications, focusing instead on dismantling crime syndicates. Even measures like the Red Book list of most-wanted human smugglers have hardly acted as deterrents. Effective action against OCGs requires a three-level approach: intelligence gathering, network analysis, and information sharing — followed by preventive tools such as sureties, listing, asset freezing, and mandatory attendance.

Moreover, international enforcement cooperation is crucial but remains lacking. The initiative, Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (Glo.ACT), funded by the EU and implemented by UNODC and IOM, included Pakistan but

focused only on soft measures like capacity building and awareness campaigns. For enforcement to be effective, source, transit, and destination countries must share real-time information on smuggling syndicates. Without this, enforcement will continue to be weak, and the blame game will continue. Stronger cooperation is difficult but essential. Embassies abroad should have tangible targets for information gathering and detection, using these as performance indicators.

One boat tragedy after another raises pressing questions about the effectiveness of enforcement and the sheer desperation driving migrants to risk their lives. Why do they still board overcrowded boats when the dangers are so well-documented? And why do smugglers continue overloading them despite the evident risks and crackdowns?

The answer lies in a grim cycle: heightened enforcement correlates with increased danger. Smugglers, having taken money, are under pressure to deliver — failing to do so invites complaints and retribution. Meanwhile, the demand for illegal migration far exceeds the available supply of safe transport, especially quality boats crossing the Mediterranean. Crackdowns only add to the chaos. Everyone is in a rush — the government, migrants, smugglers, and couriers. And this frantic pace is costing lives.

What's needed is not knee-jerk reactions, but measured, long-term, and sustainable action against organised smuggling networks. Sporadic crackdowns won't stop the strategic dismantling of these groups will, with provisions of realistic alternatives to the aspirants on GT Road.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 4, 2025

Balochistan turmoil

THE unacceptable loss of at least 22 security men in two separate attacks between Friday and Saturday — in Balochistan and KP — underscore the need to address the problem of terrorism in both provinces with alacrity.

In the first incident, at least 18 paramilitary troops were martyred as they were reportedly ambushed by terrorists in Kalat. In the second episode, four Levies personnel from Balochistan were martyred in KP's Dera Ismail Khan, near the border of both provinces.

The Kalat atrocity has been claimed by the separatist BLA, and while no group has accepted responsibility for the D.I. Khan attack, the area is known to have a TTP presence. These abhorrent attacks illustrate the fact that the biggest terrorist threat Pakistan faces comes from two major actors: religiously inspired militants, and separatist forces.

Though there is no evidence to suggest that the BLA and TTP coordinated these attacks, some experts have said that the latter may be courting the former to jointly fight the state.

After KP, Balochistan is most affected by militancy. As per one think tank, there were at least 24 terrorist attacks in the province last month, resulting in the loss of 11 security men and six civilians.

The sophistication and frequency of attacks indicate that separatist forces may be getting help from external hostile actors. Undoubtedly, the state's first priority should be to secure all of Balochistan, and ensure that its people are able to live in peace.

While security operations need to be carried out to ensure terrorist groups cannot operate freely, efforts are also required on the diplomatic front to confront inimical states, and warn them against stoking fires within the country. Moreover, funding and arms transfers to the separatists must be traced and blocked.

Yet, while the state cannot compromise on Balochistan's security, a distinction needs to be made between the province's political forces, and separatist militants. Conflating the two is unhelpful, and state action against political activists may actually propel the latter towards militancy.

Poverty, underdevelopment and the issue of enforced disappearances are hard realities in Balochistan.

Therefore, those elements that raise these issues in a democratic fashion should not be demonised by the state. Lately, we have seen terrorism cases filed against Baloch rights

activists. Indeed, in the heat of the moment, some activists may use questionable language during rallies and protests, but this cannot be equated with terrorism.

While the state should confront and neutralise actual terrorists murdering security personnel and innocent civilians, an accommodative approach is required where Baloch activists and political forces are concerned.

Though trust between the estranged Baloch population and the state cannot be built overnight, the government's most potent counterterrorism weapon can be ensuring Balochistan's full constitutional rights.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 4, 2025

3 cops martyred, 6 injured in Karak checkpoint attack



Funeral prayers were offered at Karak Police Line for police personnel martyred in an attack on a check post in Karak district's Bahadur Khel area.

Three cops were martyred while another six were injured in an attack on a police checkpoint in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terrorist activities, especially in KP and Balochistan. Attacks increased after the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022, vowing to target security officials and the police force.

According to a statement from the KP Police Central Office, "Unknown terrorists opened fire from all sides at a checkpoint in Karak's Bahadur Khel area, targeting police personnel using light and heavy weapons in an attempt to capture the checkpoint."

Policemen present at the checkpoint fired back in an encounter which lasted two hours, following which the terrorists fled, the statement said.

Police personnel injured in the firing were shifted to Karak District Headquarter Hospital, while three of the injured were sent to Peshawar for further treatment, according to District Police Officer Shehbaz Elahi.

The funeral prayers of the three martyred cops — identified as Taimur Hayat, Naqeeb and Adnan — were offered at the Karak Police Lines this morning.

KP Inspector General of Police (IG) Zulfiqar Hameed, Kohat Regional Police Officer Abbas Majeed, Kohat Commissioner Mautasim Balallah, Karak Deputy Commissioner Shakeel Jan, and other civil officers were among the attendees.

IG Hameed met the bereaved family members and assured them that the blood of the martyred would not go in vain.

The bodies of the martyred police personnel have been sent to their respective native areas.

“Our jawaans fought bravely and thwarted the enemy’s attack,” IG Hameed said while speaking to the media in Karak this morning.

“The cowardly terrorists wanted to lay siege to this checkpost, overpower it and take over our personnel. However, the terrorists were unsuccessful in their attempts and fled,” he said.

The IG further said that KP police would take good care of the families of the martyred personnel.

“KP police will uproot the menace of terrorism. The terrorists want to cause harm to the people, but the people and KP police are united,” IG Hameed said.

“Nothing will prevent us from uprooting the menace of terrorism.”

While responding to a media question, IG Hameed said KP police will “find terrorists wherever they are hiding and ensure that justice is served”, adding that all resources will be used to achieve this goal.

The IG visited the injured personnel at the Karak DHQ Hospital and directed the doctors present to provide the best treatment possible.

IG Hameed later visited the Bahadur Khel checkpost for a detailed inspection, where he assessed the planning and methodology of the attack. He also issued instructions to senior police officials present on the spot.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi condemned the attack and paid tribute to the police personnel martyred in the firing. He also expressed his condolences to the families of the martyred personnel.

“We salute the sacrifice of the martyred officers of the KP police,” he was quoted as saying in a statement on X by the interior ministry. “The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police are on the front lines in the war against terrorism.”

Uptick in terror attacks

According to the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) think-tank, 2024 was the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade, with at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks.

Data from another think-tank, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), revealed that terror attacks across the country surged by 42 per cent in January, resulting in an intensified counterterrorism campaign by security forces.

A police official was injured last month when motorcyclists attacked a police party in the Takht-i-Nusrati area of Karak district.

In the same month, a clean-up operation was launched in the mountainous terrain of Banda Daud Shah in Karak district to flush out terrorists and eliminate their hideouts.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 6, 2025

Pakistan's struggle with militancy: The blunt blade strategy doesn't work

DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

The unforgiving hills of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have long been a key battleground, both for armed confrontations as well as ideological struggles. Militancy is an old affliction in this region; a perennial problem that has been able to thrive due to the absence of good governance. As we watch another round of violence unfold, the question is not whether the militants have returned — it is how much damage they will be able to inflict before the next “comprehensive solution” is rolled out. Amid all the rhetoric about reform and repeatedly expressed resolutions for a complete victory, the only thing that has seemed constant so far is that the body count has kept rising.

The numbers are staggering — over 193 security personnel have so far this year lost their lives in counterterrorism operations. More than 35 terror attacks in October alone claimed over 40 civilian lives. Then, in one particularly chilling incident in Lower Kurram, over 100 civilians were killed in a single ambush and aftermath. These aren't just statistics — they're a glaring reminder that despite years of counterterrorism efforts, militants remain as entrenched as ever.

These militants no longer operate as ragtag groups with Kalashnikovs. They have evolved, developed complex financial networks, and have been able to recruit from the disenfranchised youth. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), it is estimated, rakes in billions through extortion, illegal taxation, and smuggling. These resources have allowed it to outlast all security operations. Though the state keeps responding with military might, the insurgents have managed to survive by offering what the state refuses to: civil services, protection, and a sense of order in the areas abandoned by the government.

A deeper question needs to be asked: what drives these groups? The answer lies in the socioeconomic conditions that breed extremism — poverty, lack of education, and high unemployment. The state has poured billions into counterterrorism operations, but without addressing these root causes; it is no wonder that its efforts have proven futile. The militants have learned to tap into the anger and frustration of young people in underdeveloped areas, promising a form of “justice” that the state has long abandoned.

Paul Collier, in his book, *Development as a Weapon of Peace*, argues that economic opportunities are the most effective weapon against insurgency. It's not enough to fight back with guns and drones: the government needs to fight back with governance.

Kinetic measures are always a double-edged sword. They yield short-term gains but are no substitute for governance. The real issue isn't lack of force; it's the absence of a cohesive, long-term strategy that focuses on building institutions and empowering communities.

According to the World Bank's 2018 Local Government Performance Index, decentralized governance where local authorities are empowered to act has a more lasting effect on peace than armed interventions. Yet, time and again, the state has opted for the easier route: send in the army, launch an operation, and call it a day. Just forgetting that fighting militancy with guns alone is like cutting weeds with a rusty blade while leaving the roots deeply entrenched in fertile soil. Meanwhile, local governments are left without the resources or authority to address the underlying grievances of the people.

The state needs to retake what it has ceded to the militants — not just militarily, but symbolically. This means providing an administration that listens to its people, responds to their needs, and is held accountable for its actions. To win, the state must be better at governing than the insurgents are at terrorizing.

One of the most glaring flaws in Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy is its overreliance on extrajudicial tactics, such as "kill-and-dump" operations. Such tactics not only fuel militant propaganda, but also undermine the state's legitimacy. Likewise, reliance on military courts to prosecute militants has deepened the public's mistrust of the justice system, because these courts lack transparency. In a region where the state is often seen as a distant, oppressive force, such heavy-handed measures only alienate local populations further.

To effectively combat militancy, the state must strengthen both its security measures and its governance framework. Militarily, Pakistan needs to refocus its efforts by providing resources and autonomy to local law enforcement agencies, such as the police and counter-terrorism departments. Backed by intelligence-sharing systems and inter-agency coordination, these must become the first line of defense.

Simultaneously, underserved districts should be given long-term investments in education, vocational training, health care, and infrastructure. As socio-economic inequalities are eliminated and more opportunities are created for the youth, their people will not be as vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

These efforts must be complemented by external measures. Pakistan's efforts to combat militancy have been hampered by the presence of safe havens in Afghanistan. The Taliban

must be pressured to dismantle militant networks in their territory. Diplomatic pressure, along with regional cooperation from countries like China and Russia, can help disrupt these cross-border threats.

The state has long relied on force, but force is a blunt instrument that can only yield temporary peace. True success lies in providing solid governance — effective, transparent governance that can restore the state’s credibility and engage local communities. To defeat militancy, the state must prove that it can offer more than what the militants do: that is, not just security, but also justice, opportunity, and prosperity.

SOURCE: ARAB NEWS.PK

Three burqa-clad terrorists killed in North Waziristan operation

Security forces killed three terrorists clad in burqas during an intelligence-based operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, the military's media wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "On the night of 6-7 February 2025, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in general area Datta Khel, North Waziristan District, on the reported presence of khwarij.

Fitnah Al Khawarij is a term the state uses to refer to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

"During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location as a result of which three khwarij were sent to hell, who were trying to escape wearing women's attire (burqa)."

It added that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area.

"Sanitisation operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area," it said, adding that the security forces were determined to "wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country". Earlier this month, 18 soldiers were martyred, and 23 terrorists were killed in various sanitisation operations in Balochistan within a day.

Terror attacks have increased since the TTP broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022, vowing to target security forces and police personnel.

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, FEBRUARY 7, 2025

9 terrorists killed in Karak, North Waziristan

NORTH WAZIRISTAN/LAKKI MARWAT: Four terrorists, including three Afghans, were killed and three others injured in a strike by security forces in North Waziristan, while police said five terrorists associated with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pak-is-tan (TTP) were killed in an encounter in Karak district.

Sources said security forces received intelligence reports that about seven to 10 terrorists, some among them Afghans, were present at a specific location in the Tappi village of Miram-shah tehsil, after which the hideout was targeted.

Sources said the strike on the terrorists' hideout left dead four militants, who were later identified as Riaz alias Muhajir, Zarar Afghan, Naqeeb-ul-lah Afghan, and Sar-kash Afghan. Three others were said to be injured.

The dead and injured terrorists were shifted to an unknown location after the operation, sources said.

Local sources reported that after the strike, a fire broke out at the hideout and some bodies were so mutilated that they were rendered unrecognisable. Security forces have cordoned off the area and initiated a search operation.

Karak operation

Separately, police and security forces killed five militants during a joint operation in Karak district.

A police official said the counterterrorism department (CTD) commandos, assisted by security forces and police, launched the late-night operation in Mir Kakam Banda area of Banda Daud Shah town, following credible information about the presence of terrorists there.

He said the terrorists affiliated with Commander Kalimullah group of the banned TTP opened fire on law enforcers when they reached near the hideouts, leading to a fierce gun battle which continued for one hour.

During a search after the exchange of fire, the law enforcement personnel found the bodies of five terrorists along with arms and ammunition, the official maintained.

He identified the dead terrorists as Muhammad Shoaib, brother of TTP commander; Sabeel Khan alias Usman alias Haqyar, residents of Bannu; Wajid alias Sangri and Shah Qiaz alias Sanari alias Parak, residents of Karak; and Badil Jan, a resident of Kohat.

“The slain terrorists were involved in bank robberies, attacks on polio teams and police and FC installation and Lachi toll plaza,” the official said, adding that their 10 accomplices armed with rocket launchers, hand grenades, assault rifles and ammunition escaped the scene taking advantage of darkness.

The official said the dead terrorists and their fleeing accomplices had attacked a police post in Bahadarkhel area last week wherein three policemen embraced martyrdom and six others were injured.

“The CTD commandos and police are tracking down the fleeing terrorists in the area,” he added.

Bomb attack

In Lakki Marwat, police personnel narrowly escaped a bomb attack on the Lakki-Darra Tang section of busy Bannu-Mianwali Road.

A police official said that the cops on patrol duty in an armoured personnel carrier vehicle were targeted with an improvised explosive device planted along the roadside near Peerwala Mor.

“The bomb went off with a bang but luckily all policemen remained safe,” he maintained. He said the blast damaged the APC vehicle, shattering its front screen.

After the explosion, a large police contingent reached the place and launched a search for the perpetrators in the surrounding area.

On the other hand, Regional Police Officer, Bannu, Imran Shahid paid a surprise inspection visit to the Bannu’s city police station to check security arrangements.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 11, 2025

16 Pakistanis confirmed dead in Libya boat tragedy

The bodies of 16 Pakistanis have been recovered with as many as 63 Pakistanis suspected on board a vessel that capsized off the coast of Libya, the Foreign Office (FO) said.

The incident comes on the heels of a similar tragedy last month in which a boat carrying 80 passengers capsized near Morocco. While the identities of at least 13 Pakistanis killed in the incident were confirmed, over 40 citizens were reportedly murdered by African human traffickers on the boat and only 22 survived the tragedy.

In a statement today, the FO said that a team from the Pakistani Embassy in Tripoli visited Zawiya city and gathered information after meeting local officials and the Zawiya hospital.

“According to unconfirmed reports, there were 63 Pakistanis on the boat and so far 16 dead bodies have been recovered and their Pakistani nationalities established on the basis of their passports.

“There are 37 survivors, including one in hospital and 33 in police custody. Reportedly, around 10 Pakistanis are missing in the accident. Three of the survivors are in Tripoli and being looked after by the Embassy,” the statement said.

The list of names shared by the FO contained details of the bodies recovered so far.

“The Embassy in Tripoli is in the process of gathering further information and maintaining contact with the local authorities,” the statement said.

A day earlier, the FO said that a ‘Crisis Management Unit’ has been activated to monitor the situation.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 11, 2025

Corruption ranking

It comes as little surprise. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2024, unveiled on Tuesday, sees Pakistan drop two points from its overall score, which now stands at 27. It is an embarrassing reflection on those in power, especially after the improvement reported just a year earlier. Several stakeholders had rushed to take credit for Pakistan's two-point improvement in 2023, celebrating it as a shining example of the country doing better under its new management. It remains to be seen whether anyone will step forward to take responsibility for the regression that has been seen the very next year. As it is, there are several other fires that need tending. Looking at the broader picture, the CPI trend for Pakistan reveals some interesting insights. Starting from 2018, the country has done consistently worse every year in terms of the perceived prevalence of corruption, with 2023 being the sole exception. This decline has run parallel to the increasing influence of unelected stakeholders in governance, raising concerns about accountability and transparency under 'hybrid' regimes. On the other hand, between 2012 and 2018, Pakistan did consistently better in terms of perceived corruption in the country. This should be taken as an opportunity for reflection.

Another major concern highlighted by Transparency International is the impact of perceived corruption on pressing climate-related needs. "Corruption obstructs environmental policy, hijacks climate financing and hinders the enforcement of regulations and policies, leaving the most vulnerable with little recourse," TI notes in a statement on the Asia Pacific region. With respect to Pakistan, it finds "systemic governance gaps and policy implementation barriers — including delays in implementing regulations and establishing institutions under the Climate Change Act of 2017", which have "left its climate finance far below the projected \$348bn needed by 2030". This is deeply worrying. Pakistan must work with international partners and donors to meet critical climate adaptation needs, yet these efforts risk being undermined by persistent concerns over financial mismanagement, which could potentially deter international donors from investing in Pakistan's climate resilience. While the country is making efforts to improve its policy, governance and administrative capacities for what will be a long struggle against environmental devastation, corruption, it seems, is the little-discussed Achilles' heel. It must receive the same attention and seriousness as efforts to secure climate finance. Without this, much good work will be wasted.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 13, 2025

TTP still gets financial, logistic support from Afghan Taliban

ISLAMABAD: A United Nations report has revealed that Afghan Taliban's continued support for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), despite Islamabad's increasing pressure to cease backing the outfit, was fuelling the group's escalating attacks in Pakistan.

This was stated in the 35th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted to the UN Security Council.

The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team is a panel of independent experts established by the UN Security Council to support sanctions implementation against individuals and entities linked to Al Qaeda, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Daesh) and associated groups.

The team submits biannual reports assessing the threat landscape posed by these organisations to inform international policy and security strategies.

The report, covering the period from July 1 to Dec 13, 2024, states the "status and strength of TTP in Afghanistan had not changed", while the group intensified its assaults on Pakistan, conducting over 600 attacks during the reporting period, many launched from Afghan territory.

Financial, operational backing

It underscored that the Taliban continued to provide the outlawed TTP with logistical and operational space and financial support, bolstering the group's capacity to sustain its activities.

The report revealed that the family of TTP leader Noor Wali Masoud receives around \$43,000 per month from the Afghan Taliban, reflecting a significant level of financial backing for the terrorist group.

The TTP has also "established new training centres in Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika (Barmal) provinces" while enhancing recruitment, including from within the Afghan Taliban's ranks.

This expansion has contributed to TTP's continued status as the largest Afghanistan-based terrorist organisation, with an estimated 6,000 to 6,500 fighters. The group's growing

influence is linked to the Afghan Taliban's continued ideological and historical ties with TTP.

Amid escalating attacks, Pakistan has intensified military operations under "Azm-i-Istehkam", targeting TTP hideouts across the Afghan border, particularly in Paktika and Khost. These military measures include cross-border raids and retaliatory strikes.

Simultaneously, Pakistan pursued diplomatic engagements, sending delegations to Kabul to urge the Afghan Taliban to take action against TTP sanctuaries. However, the Afghan authorities remained reluctant, proposing mediation rather than decisive measures, leading to a diplomatic impasse.

The UN report corroborates these developments, highlighting that the Taliban's support has enabled TTP to escalate its offensive strategy against Pakistan. The report stated, "The ambition and scale of its (TTP) attacks on Pakistan... had significantly increased."

TTP's operational capabilities have been further strengthened by increased collaboration with Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and other terrorist groups. The report indicates that these organisations are "conducting attacks under the banner of Tehrik-i-Jihad Pakistan (TJP)".

The report warned that enhanced cooperation among these terrorist groups, including "provision of suicide bombers and fighters and ideological guidance", could transform TTP into an "extra-regional threat" and potentially an umbrella organisation for other terrorist factions operating in South Asia.

The proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), through its Majeed Brigade, executed several high-casualty attacks across south-western Pakistan, including in Awaran, Panjgur, and Dalbandin, during the reporting period, according to the report. Notably, the Majeed Brigade has incorporated women into its ranks.

The report observed that the Majeed Brigade maintains connections with the banned TTP, Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), and ETIM/TIP, collaborating with these groups in its operational bases in Afghanistan. This emerging nexus between the BLA, which traditionally pursues ethno-nationalist objectives, and religiously inspired terrorist groups like TTP, indicates a strategic convergence of interests.

High-profile operatives

Pakistani security forces, according to the report, dealt a significant setback to IS-K efforts to establish its network in Pakistan by arresting three high-profile operatives.

The IS-K leaders identified as Adil Panjsheri, an Afghan national, Abu Munzir, a Tajik, and Kaka Younis, an Uzbek, were said to be central figures in recruitment, travel and funding

of fighters and suicide bombers, including those involved in attacks in Kerman and Moscow.

Their arrest was previously not announced by Pakistani security forces, which regularly publicise their counter-terrorism operations.

The report described Panj-sheri as a coordinator of travel and logistics for IS-K, while Munzir managed recruitment networks across Central Asia. Younis was identified as a key financier of terrorist activities.

Despite these arrests, Tariq Tajiki, believed to be the mastermind behind the Kerman attack, remains at large in Afghanistan, the report noted.

To avoid detection and minimise further arrests, IS-K, according to the report, has switched from electronic communications to traditional courier networks for delivering instructions and holding meetings.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 15, 2025

Four army personnel martyred, 15 terrorists killed in KP operations



This combination photo shows Lieutenant Muhammad Hassaan Arshaf, Naib Subedar Muhammad Bilal, Sepoy Farhat Ullah and Sepoy Himat Khan.

Four soldiers were martyred while 15 terrorists were killed in two separate intelligence-based operations (IBOs) carried out in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to the military's media wing.

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 (TTP) broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022.

A statement from the the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the first IBO took place in Dera Ismail Khan district's general area of Hathala on the reported presence of terrorists in the area.

It said security forces effectively engaged the terrorists at their location and resultantly, nine of them, including high-value target ringleaders Farman alias Saqib, Kharji Amanullah alias Toori, Kharji Saeed alias Liaqat and Kharji Bilal, "were sent to hell".

The ISPR said the slain were involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area and were highly wanted by law enforcement agencies.

It said the second IBO was conducted in the general area of Miranshah in North Waziristan district where six more terrorists were “effectively neutralised by the security forces”.

“However, during an intense fire exchange, Lieutenant Muhammad Hassaan Arshaf, 21, resident of Lahore district, leading his troops from the front, fought gallantly and embraced martyrdom along with his three men,” the ISPR said.

“The three soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice include Naib Subedar Muhammad Bilal, 39, resident of Dera Ismail Khan district, Sepoy Farhat Ullah, 27, resident of Lakki Marwat district and Sepoy Himat Khan, 29, resident of Momand district,” it continued.

The ISPR added that sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area.

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

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised security forces for their successful operation against terrorists in KP, paying tribute to the four martyred security personnel in separate statements.

In a statement released by the Presidency, President Zardari said that the nation would always remember the sacrifices of its valiant martyrs, and praised their patriotism and bravery. He also reiterated the “unflinching national resolve” to continue operations until the complete elimination of terrorism, The Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

The PM paid tribute to the martyred personnel who sacrificed themselves during the operation, according to a statement on X.

“The entire nation, including me, is proud of our martyrs and their families,” PM Shehbaz was quoted as saying. “We will continue the fight against terrorism until it is completely eradicated from the country. We will never allow the terrorists’ nefarious intentions to disrupt the peace of the country to succeed.”

The PM said that the nation salutes “its brave forces” for their unwavering commitment to national security. “The officers and men of the Pakistani Armed Forces are working day and night to protect the homeland, risking their lives,” he stated.

Earlier in the week, security forces killed 13 terrorists in five separate operations carried out across KP on Thursday night.

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, FEBRUARY 15, 2025

Four security men martyred in Balochistan attacks

QUETTA: Four security personnel were martyred and eight others injured in armed attacks on the Frontier Corps and Levies' check posts in Kalat and Kech districts.

In a third incident, a police station in Noshki also came under attack.

Officials said the Levies check post was targeted in the Togho Chpeer area in the early hours of Sunday. Balochistan government spokesman Shahid Raid said unidentified men opened fire at the post, adding that the Levies personnel retaliated and returned fire. The exchange continued for some time after which the assailants fled.

“As a result of gunfight, one Levies man lost his life while two others were seriously injured,” Mr Rind said, adding that after receiving information about the assault Levies forces rushed to the site and shifted the body and the injured to the Kalat district hospital.

The martyr was identified as Ali Nawaz Langove while the injured were Ghulam Ali and Moham-mad Ayub Langove. “An operation is underway in the area to trace the attackers,” officials said. In Kech district, unkn-own armed men attacked a check post of the paramilitary Frontier Corps late on Saturday night.

Officials said that FC personnel deployed at the post engaged the assailants. During a heavy gun battle, three soldiers were martyred and six others injured, they added.

The injured and bodies were shifted to a hospital where the martyred FC personnel were identified as Naik Gul Sanat, Lance Naik Rana Zakir and Sepoy Lakhmir, officials said, adding that the condition of the two injured was critical.

Later, all the injured were transferred to Quetta for treatment.

Sepoy Lakhmir belonged to the Nasirabad area of Balochistan.

More FC troops moved to the area after the attack and a search operation was launched.

Reports suggested that miscreants also attempted to storm a police station and a Levies forces' station in the Mashkey area on Saturday night. However, personnel at both the places offered resistance and foiled their attempts to enter the two buildings.

Hand grenade lobbed

On Sunday evening, unidentified motorcyclists threw a hand grenade into a police station in Noshki, officials said, adding that the device exploded near the building. Sources said that armed men also opened fire, which the police personnel returned forcing the assailants to flee.

No casualty was reported in the incident. However, a wall of the police station was slightly damaged by the impact of the blast.

Condemnation

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has condemned the terrorist attack on the Levies check post in Kalat. In a statement, he said terrorists were enemies of the development and progress of Balochistan. The premier prayed for the martyr's high rank, saying he had sacrificed his life to defend the motherland.

The prime minister wished the injured a speedy recovery and reaffirmed the government's resolve to not "allow the nefarious designs of terrorists to succeed".

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti also denounced the attack on the Levies' check post. He hailed Ali Nawaz, the martyr, for fulfilling his duties and setting an "example of bravery by sacrificing his life".

He said the elements involved in the attack would be brought to justice soon.



Chief Minister's Office Balochistan
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وزیر اعلیٰ بلوچستان میر سرفراز بگٹی کا قلات لیویز چوکی حملے کی شدید مذمت

وزیر اعلیٰ بلوچستان میر سرفراز بگٹی نے قلات میں لیویز چوکی پر ہونے والے حملے کی شدید مذمت کرتے ہوئے شہید لیویز اہلکار علی نواز کی قربانی کو خراج عقیدت پیش کیا۔ انہوں نے کہا کہ شہید علی نواز نے فرائض کی ادائیگی میں جان نچھاور کر کے بہادری کی مثال قائم کی۔

وزیر اعلیٰ بلوچستان نے شہید اہلکار کے اہل خانہ کے غم میں برابر کے شریک ہونے کا اظہار کیا اور زخمی لیویز اہلکاروں کی جلد صحتیابی کے لیے دعا کی۔ انہوں نے دہشتگردوں کے خلاف لیویز فورس کی جرات مندانہ کارروائی اور فوری ردعمل کو سراہا اور کہا کہ لیویز فورس کے جوانوں کی بہادری اور قربانیاں رائیگاں نہیں جائیں گی۔

وزیر اعلیٰ بلوچستان نے مزید کہا کہ بلوچستان کے عوام کے تحفظ کے لیے سیکورٹی فورسز کی قربانیوں کو ہمیشہ یاد رکھا جائے گا۔

#CMSarfrazBugti

@PakSarfrazbugti

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 17, 2025

Number of migrants doubled since 1990: UN

ISLAMABAD: The number of international migrants worldwide in 2024 stood at 304 million, a figure that has nearly doubled since 1990, when there were an estimated 154 million migrants globally, a new United Nations report says.

The International Migrant Stock 2024 yet to be released by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Desa) says despite robust growth in the absolute number of international migrants over recent decades, their share of the world's population remains small: in 2024 just 3.7 per cent of people globally were international migrants, having increased only modestly from 2.9 per cent in 1990.

The US hosted more international migrants than any other country in 2024, with 52.4 million. Germany was the second leading destination for international migrants, hosting 16.8m in 2024, followed by Saudi Arabia (13.7m), the UK (11.8m), France (9.2m), Spain (8.9m), Canada (8.8m), the UAE (8.2m), Australia (8.1m), the Russia (7.6m), Turkiye (7.1m) and Italy (6.6m). In 2024, the report says, just under half (48pc) of all international migrants worldwide were women or girls. In Europe and Northern America, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean, women and girls comprised around half of all international migrants and their share was essentially unchanged between 1990 and 2024.

Europe hosted more international migrants than any other region with 94m in 2024. Northern America was home to the second largest number with 61m, followed by the region of Northern Africa and Western Asia with 54m.

Europe experienced the largest increase in the number of international migrants among the eight regions, with the addition of 43m between 1990 and 2024.

The pace of growth of Europe's international migrant stock increased since 2020, due largely to refugee flows from Ukraine. Northern America added 34m international migrants between 1990 and 2024; however, the pace of growth in that region has slowed over time. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of international migrants in Northern America increased by less than one per cent per year, on average, compared to average annual growth rates of 3.8pc during 1990-2000 and 2.3pc during 2000-2010.

With 46m people in 2024, the total population of Oceania was small relative to the other regions, yet international migrants comprised 21pc of the residents.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 18, 2025

SDG targets remain off track in Asia-Pacific, says UN report

ISLAMABAD: Progress towards each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia and the Pacific remains significantly off track, with most targets advancing too slowly or stagnating despite ongoing efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, revealed a new United Nations report.

The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025, released by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), said the progress towards several goals was far too slow, particularly on responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), quality education (Goal 4), and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8).

Key drivers of this stagnation include increases in fossil fuel subsidies, poor proficiency in reading and mathematics, and unsustainable production patterns.

In addition, negative trends on environmental indicators, such as the economic benefits from sustainable fisheries and the extent of land degradation hinder progress on life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15), according to the report.

Alarming regression on climate action (Goal 13) has been driven by the region's vulnerability to disasters and continued greenhouse gas emissions, which account for half of such pollution worldwide. In contrast, the region has made notable progress on industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9) and good health and well-being (Goal 3), driven by expanded access to mobile networks and remarkable improvements in maternal, infant and child health, demonstrating that targeted investments and effective policies can yield significant gains.

The report said lack of progress towards environmental sustainability was a key obstacle for regional progress towards the 2030 targets. Among the 117 targets with sufficient data, only 16 were on track to be achieved by 2030 and 18 showed a negative trend in need of urgent reversal. The majority of the 18 targets are related to climate-related challenges and disaster risk.

While Asia and the Pacific is outperforming the rest of the world on most of the goals, it falls behind on others. The region has shown notable strength compared to the average progress by the rest of the world on several goals.

The region leads in progress on Goal 1 (mainly for progress on reducing income poverty), Goal 2 (for reducing the prevalence of undernourishment), Goal 9 (for passenger and freight volume and small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit), Goal 12 (for reducing hazardous waste generated), Goal 15 (for a slower land degradation) and Goal 16 (for reducing detected victims of human trafficking and intentional homicide).

However, the region falls significantly behind the rest of the world in progressing on Goals 8, 13, 14, and 17. Progress assessments at the national level reveal the diversity of progress across the region, with emerging and regressing trends providing critical early warnings for policymakers. While strong progress is evident overall on Goal 9 and Goal 3, some countries are lagging behind and need targeted attention to accelerate progress.

Conversely, although the region shows regression or stagnation on Goals 12 and 13, some countries are leading in these areas, offering valuable lessons for others to follow. The emerging regressing trends are particularly noteworthy in areas of high achievement, where safeguarding past gains on sustainable development is essential.

Development benefits often bypass vulnerable groups, with intersecting factors like age, gender, education, location and wealth exacerbating inequalities. Household survey data reveals that poverty is the most significant factor contributing to inequality of opportunity. Education level follows as the second most critical factor.

Data availability across countries in the Asia-Pacific region shows a slow yet positive trend with an average of 54pc of indicators having at least two data points in 2024, a small increase from the previous year. Notably, the region outpaces the rest of the world by 6pc.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 19, 2025

7 Punjab-bound travellers gunned down in Balochistan's Barkhan



Photo shows coach after an incident where unarmed men offloaded seven passengers and killed them in Balochistan's Barkhan.

QUETTA: Unidentified gunmen killed seven people travelling to Punjab after off-loading them from a passenger bus, in the Barkhan district.

Officials told Dawn that a group of around 40 armed men stopped several buses and other vehicles near Rakhani, on the Barkhan-Dera Ghazi Khan Highway.

“Armed men offloaded seven passengers from a coach after checking their identity cards and killed them,” Barkhan Deputy Commissioner Waqar Khurshid Alam said.

“All seven who were travelling in the coach belonged to Punjab, and were on their way to Lahore,” he said.

After disembarking them from the coach, the gunmen opened fire, killing them on the spot, he said, adding that the attackers managed to escape.

The bodies of the seven slain men were later shifted to the district headquarters hospital.

The Barkhan deputy commissioner said that FC and levies personnel had reached the site and cordoned off the area.

Balochistan has witnessed a spate of attacks targeting those hailing from Punjab. In two separate incidents in April 2024, nine people were killed after being forced off a bus near Noshki, while two labourers from Punjab were shot in Kech.

In May last year, seven barbers from Punjab were shot dead near Gwadar, while August saw 23 travellers offloaded from trucks and buses and shot in the Musakhail district.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 19, 2025

Criminalising Poverty, Weaponizing Law

DR. SYED KALEEM IMAM

In my younger years, two Urdu magazines were widely read in Pakistan: Suspense and Jasoosi Digest. Their readers may remember a fictional character, Batthal, a minor offender who turns into a hardened criminal after spending a few years in prison.

He later morphs into a don. As the story progresses, the reader is subtly told how jails often serve as a nursery for criminals. Many of them keep on returning to their ‘alma mater’ for ‘advanced studies’. Sadly, unlike civilised parts of the world, where jails serve as rehabilitation centres, in Pakistan, they nurture evil talents. Serving time is often worn as a badge of honour by felons.

It is striking how inconsistently we apply the law. Drug addicts who need medical treatment are thrown behind bars, where they are supplied with the substances, they were addicted to, just so they can survive withdrawals. Likewise, young boys are booked for “obscene acts” if no one can explain their offense, and petty beggars, whose only crime, it seems, is their poverty, are arrested under vagrancy laws. The homeless are dragged to courtrooms instead of shelters, and street vendors frequently face legal penalties simply for trying to eke out a meagre living.

Our citizens often find themselves wondering, isn’t a legal system meant to deliver justice, not add insult to injury?

Pakistan’s prison system is extremely overcrowded due to excessive pre-trial detention. As of November 2024, the country’s 128 prisons, built for 66,625 inmates, were holding 108,643 prisoners—a 163.07 per cent occupancy rate. Among these prisoners, 98.2 per cent are men, 1.1 per cent are women, and 0.7 per cent are juveniles. Rehabilitation programmes were reserved only for convicts. Delays in judicial proceedings are responsible for a staggering 70 per cent of the under-trial prison population.

Our legal framework is full of contradictions. We have many progressive laws, but these usually remain unenforced due to a mix of bureaucratic inertia, political considerations, or deliberate non-compliance. Meanwhile, others, written in vague and problematic terms, have become tools for selective repression. The legal system has been gradually moulded into an instrument of control.

For example, the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act of 2020 is meant to safeguard women. It has proven largely ineffective because of police reluctance and

societal stigma. Conviction rates in cases pertaining to violence against women hover between a measly 1-2 per cent, discouraging victims from seeking justice and leaving them victims caught between a rock and a hard place.

Likewise, the Juvenile Justice System Act of 2018 mandated separate trials for minors, but nearly 1,500 juvenile offenders remain incarcerated; many tried as adults due to flawed age verification procedures.

Bureaucratic red tape delayed any meaningful implementation of the Right to Information Act, which was aimed at ensuring transparency. The Environmental Protection Act of 1997 largely remains ignored. The Police Order of 2002 was introduced to improve policing, but several provinces rolled it back. As a result, our law-enforcement agencies remain subservient to political interests.

Since 1990, the HRCP says, at least 80 suspects have been lynched without any investigation or trial.

Similarly, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, drafted to counter extremist violence, is frequently invoked in cases involving routine crime and even protests and political dissension. Over 38,800 cases have been registered under it since it was passed into law.

Our Exit Control List (ECL) was supposed to stop criminals from fleeing justice; it now prevents 4,863 individuals from international travel. Some 3,000 names are pending removal amid concerns over its misuse. Likewise, the Control of Narcotic Substances Act of 1997 disproportionately targets small offenders, while major drug cartels evade meaningful prosecution. Consider the records: in 2022–23, the police force registered a total 163,468 cases involving narcotics and made 166,888 arrests, but only 26,322 convictions were secured.

Pakistan also has many skeletons in its closet from the past. Colonial-era laws such as Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (which deals with sedition) and the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1960 are often used to silence critics and control dissent.

Now is the time to draw lessons from global best practices. Countries that have worked on harm reduction and moved to decriminalise smaller offenses have reported good results. According to a report—Drug Policy Alliance. Drug Decriminalization in Portugal: Health & Human-Centered Approach published in August 2023—Portugal decriminalised drug possession in 2001 and prioritised the rehabilitation of addicts instead of jailing them. This led to an 80 per cent drop in drug-related deaths.

Another report published in 2024, FEANTSA. Homelessness Strategy in the Netherlands (2024), states that the Netherlands reduced homelessness by 50 per cent over a decade by replacing punishment with social housing programmes. Germany's NetzDG Law

imposed strict regulations on online hate speech but also introduced media literacy programmes and independent oversight to prevent state overreach.

Decriminalisation shifts the focus from punishment to crime prevention, rehabilitation, and institutional transformation, with absolving responsibility. The certainty of a moderate punishment always achieves more than the fear of excessive punishment that is never enforced, as legal thinker Cesare Beccaria noted in his work, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764).

Delaying reforms will merely kick the can down the road, prolonging the injustices being suffered by the weak. Pakistan must strive for a legal system that upholds the dignity of citizens rather than one that seeks to punish trivial transgressions. We must shift from punitive control to restorative justice before the house of cards comes crashing down.

SOURCE: FEBRUARY 21, 2025, WENEWS ENGLISH.PK

10 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in KP's Khyber district

Security forces killed 10 terrorists 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 security forces conducted an IBO in the district's general area of Bagh based on a reported terrorist presence.

It added that the troops "effectively engaged" the terrorists at their location because of which 10 of them were "sent to hell".

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

Security forces killed seven terrorists in two separate operations carried out in KP's Dera Ismail Khan district, the ISPR had said a day ago.

Last week, security forces killed 30 terrorists in an IBO in KP's South Waziristan district.

Pakistan has recently witnessed an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan. Terror attacks have increased since the proscribed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan group broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022.

A security report, released last 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, FEBRUARY 24, 2025

Global system undergoing ‘tectonic shift’, says UN

GENEVA: The international system is in upheaval with human rights being “suffocated”, the United Nations said, warning that an era of “dictators” could return.

During an opening address at the UN Human Rights Council’s main annual session, UN rights chief Volker Turk painted a dark picture of a “very dangerous” situation in a world increasingly dominated by authoritarians.

He did not mention any country — even as the world grapples with the Russia-Ukraine war, dramatic changes in the United States and a more assertive China. It was clear, he said though, that “the international system is going through a tectonic shift”.

“The human rights edifice we have built up so painstakingly over decades has never been under so much strain.” The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is to give a more detailed address to the council next week, when he assesses specific country events.

Rights ‘crumbling’ under authoritarians

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned the council that one by one, human rights were being “suffocated”, adding: “by autocrats, crushing opposition because they fear what a truly empowered people would do. By a patriarchy that keeps girls out of school and women at arm’s length from basic rights.” Governments behind wars “thumb their nose at international law, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter”, he said, while conflicts were stripping people “of their right to food, water and education”.

Turk also cautioned that “the global consensus on human rights is crumbling under the weight of authoritarians, strongmen and oligarchs”.

“By some estimates, autocrats now control around one-third of the world’s economy — more than double the proportion 30 years ago.” He stressed a need for “an all-out effort by everyone to make sure that human rights and the rule of law remain foundational to communities, societies and international relations”.

“Otherwise, the picture is very dangerous.” Turk pointed to “the unrestrained use of force by the powerful” in previous centuries.

Dictator era could return

“Dictators could order atrocity crimes consigning vast numbers of people to their deaths,” he said, adding: “Be aware: this can happen again”. He pointed to how some modern-day leaders “cite national security and the fight against terrorism to justify gross violations”.

Without naming countries, he warned that “regional powers that are neutral or hostile to human rights are growing in influence”. “Everywhere, we see attempts to ignore, undermine, and redefine human rights; and to create a false binary that pits one right against another in a zero-sum game,” Turk lamented.

“There are concerted efforts to chip away at gender equality, and the rights of migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and minorities of all kinds.” Turk voiced alarm at the role played by digital technologies, which he warned were being “widely misused to suppress, limit and violate our rights”.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 25, 2025

The missing children of Karachi — how the state is failing its most vulnerable

MUZHIRA AMIN



Chaos reigned at the Pervez household on the morning of January 7. It was the first day of school after the winter holidays and his three sons, Aariz, Sarim and Azfar, sure were a handful. The commotion would normally last till 10pm when the boys would forcefully be sent to bed.

That day, however, the home had fallen uncharacteristically silent by sunset. Five-year-old Sarim, the middle child, had been missing since 3:40pm. He had gone to a nearby madrassah with his brother, which Mohsin Pervez said was located at a four-minute walk. He never came home.

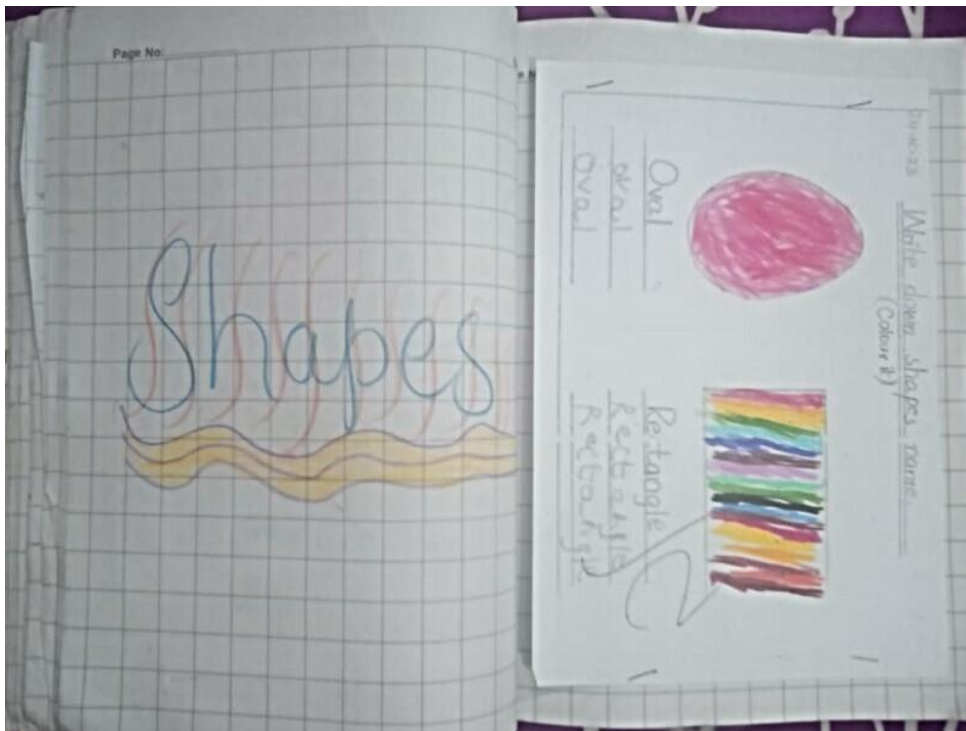
Aariz and Sarim had a habit of racing home from the madrassah every day. Sarim, being the smarter one both in class and outside, always took the shorter route home and won, Pervez recalled. “He lost that day.”

Even before the police were called and an official search began, Sarim’s father knew his son hadn’t gotten lost or run away. “He was a responsible kid, and he knew the

neighbourhood well because he would get daily essentials for his mother on days I came home late. We had even made him memorise our address,” he said.

The family feared he was in danger. “The police promised they would find him,” Pervez recalled. “We were hopeful.”

For the next week, all of Sarim’s belongings sat in their original place at their home in New Karachi; a packed school bag, a neat bed and a cabinet stacked with his favourite brand of macaroni — the one he had asked his mother to cook the day he went missing. But with each passing day, the hope of Sarim returning home waned further.



A picture of Sarim’s textbooks provided by his parents.

In the last two months alone, 56 children, all between the ages of zero and 18, were kidnapped or went missing across Karachi. The highest number of abductions were reported in District East, police data shows. Of these, 22 remain missing.

The figures follow a similar pattern from last year, when around 400 children were kidnapped or reported missing in the port city.

The FIR fiasco

Pervez remembers Jan 7 as if it were yesterday. He had dropped his boys home from school at around 12:30pm and then left for work. About four hours later, his panicked sister called to inform him about Sarim. He rushed home to find the entire neighbourhood in disarray.

He combed the neighbourhood frantically — the nearby playground, the neighbour’s house, the madrassah. The father called out for an hour but didn’t hear back. Tired and out of breath, Pervez sat on the stairs of the mosque adjoining the madrassah where Sarim went. There, he noticed a pair of black gloves, the same he had made his son wear that morning.

That is when he decided to go to the nearby Bilal Colony Police Station. “But upon reaching there, we were told to get an application ‘on typing’ — a printout,” he told Dawn.com.

“It took me an hour to get it after which I returned to the police station with the application and Sarim’s photographs. They told me that the complaint would be forwarded to the station house officer and the investigating officer,” Pervez said, adding that he subsequently returned home.

But he didn’t see or hear back from the police for the next several hours. “So I went to the police station again and found they had forgotten about the application I submitted.”

Finally, at 12:05am, over nine hours after Sarim had gone missing, a first information report (FIR) was registered. Pervez returned home, pulled a chair, sat at the entrance of his block and waited.

Child abuse cases in Sindh

	Forced marriage	Kidnapping	Missing child	Sexual abuse
2019	13	25	131	105
2020	35	73	1196	175
2021	39	67	224	165
2022	32	39	134	73
2023	46	48	296	106
2024	47	63	391	102

Data from Sindh Child Protection Agency

The police, on the other hand, had a different version of events. Central Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Zeeshan Shafiq Siddiqi told Dawn.com that the FIR was registered immediately after the complaint was submitted. “After that, we visited the area ourselves and collected all the evidence.”

Siddiqi added that the police also searched all the flats in the area the next day.

According to child protection lawyers, the period between when a child goes missing and the registration of the FIR plays a crucial role in their recovery. “As noted in international studies, the psychology of an abuser is such that they are cowards and will likely let the child go if the police make it to their street. But the more the delay in the response, the more vulnerable the child gets,” said Miqdad Mehdi, a high court advocate, who previously served as the national coordinator of the Working Group against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitations.

But when parents visit a police station, he continued, they face problems. “If a boy is missing, they are told to wait for him to come back. And if it’s a girl, a teenager or relatively older, it is assumed that she has eloped which becomes embarrassing for the family.”

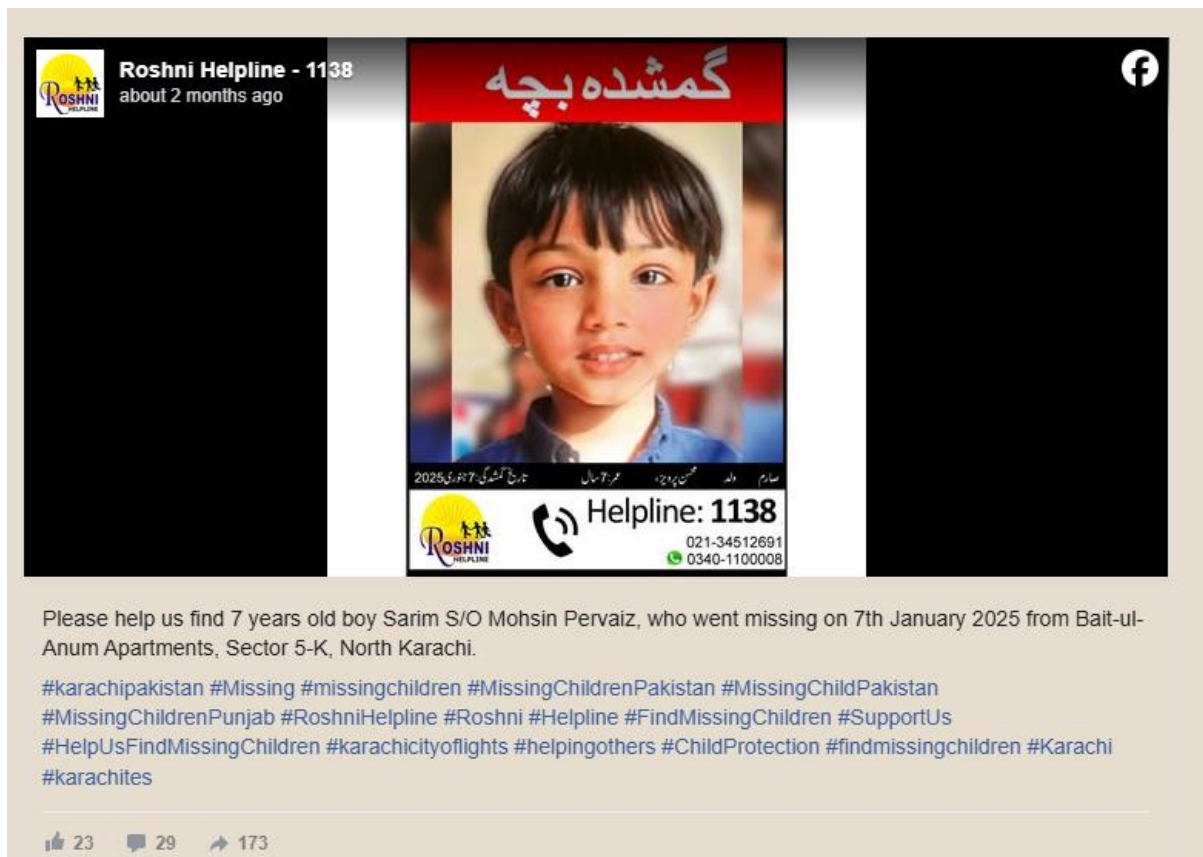
“Ajayega bacha (the child will come back)” and “Ye ink ghar ka maamla hay (this is their personal matter)” are some sentences often heard from the police in such cases despite the law saying otherwise.

Mehdi pointed out that under the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act (ZARRA) 2020 — aimed at raising alarm and aiding in the response and recovery of missing or abducted children — police are bound to register an FIR within two hours of a child being reported missing by their parents. But while the law is enforced across Pakistan, its implementation is lacking because rules under it are yet to be framed — such as operational requirements such as networking with all national and provincial stakeholders etc.

“When you go to the police and they delay the response, they don’t even know about the repercussions for not adhering to the law,” he lamented.

The investigation and the investigators

For the next four days after the registration of the FIR, Sarim’s father didn’t hear anything from the police except for an occasional visit to the area once a day. During this time, the family put up posters — Sarim in a blue shirt, his eyes twinkling, nose pudgy and hair dishevelled — on social media seeking any information about the missing child.



“It was then that I started getting extortion and ransom calls,” Pervez said. “These people claimed to have seen Sarim and demanded money in exchange for information. But when we probed them with questions regarding his appearance, none had any answer.”

According to his father, the day he went missing, Sarim was wearing a sky-blue shirt, brown pants, and red and blue striped sneakers.

Following the ransom calls, the case was transferred from the Bilal Colony Police Station to the Anti-Violence Crime Cell (AVCC) — a specialised police unit addressing violent crimes such as murder and extortion in Karachi. According to SSP Central, kidnapping for ransom falls under the mandate of the AVCC.

“We were satisfied with the transfer,” said Pervez. They began the investigation afresh. Dawn.com reached out to the AVCC to understand the investigation mechanism of child kidnapping cases but they didn’t respond to our queries.

However, Mohammad Farooq, cofounder of the Zainab Alert application — developed to facilitate the rapid reporting and recovery of missing or abducted children in Pakistan — explained that 99.9 per cent of such cases were reported to the app because it worked in tandem with the Citizens Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), child protection bureau and other agencies.

“When a case comes to us, the first step is to guide the parents to reach out to the police and get an FIR registered,” he said. “We alert the police ourselves as well.”

The next step is to dig deeper; find out the age of the child, check if there is a custody issue, and guide parents to check water tanks, open manholes, shelter homes and hospitals. Once the case is verified, an alert is issued for law enforcement agencies, child protection bureaus and non-profit organisations such as the Edhi Foundation.

At this point though, social media is not involved. “Before that, we vet the case thoroughly to ensure that it does not pertain to kidnapping for ransom because if the information is released beforehand, it could endanger the child,” Farooq explained.

From then onwards, the team actively worked on the case along with the police which also included visiting the parents and alerting CPLC offices across the province. As and if the severity of the case increases, further departments are engaged as was done in Sarim’s case.

Valerie Khan Yousafzai, a child protection expert and development practitioner working on human rights, called the work done by the CPLC and Zainab Alert app the “best in Pakistan” but at the same time pointed out that there was a lack of coordination at a multi-sectoral, intra-provincial and inter-provincial level.

That, combined with a lack of effective rule of law and implementation, particularly those regarding child protection, was affecting the efficiency of timely and adequate response needed in such cases, she added.

On Jan 18, exactly 11 days after he went missing, at about 10:30am, Sarim’s body was found floating in an underground water tank in his apartment complex. On the day the five-year-old went missing, the police, along with the family, had checked the same water tank but found nothing there.

The next day, his case was transferred back to the Bilal Colony police station from the AVCC, Pervez told Dawn.com.

The broader picture

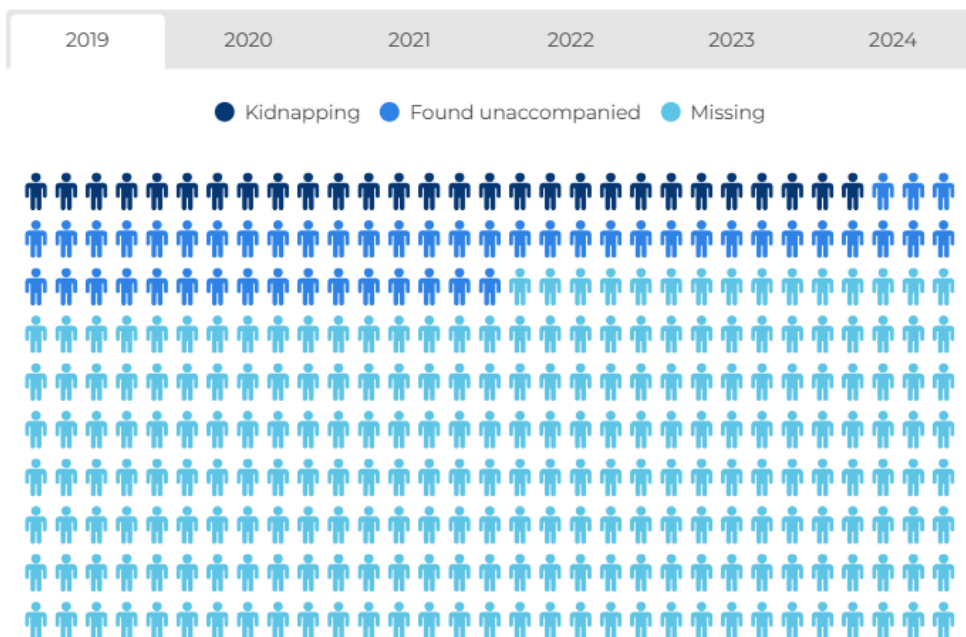
Sarim’s autopsy reports concluded that he was murdered after being subjected to sexual assault. It stated that the minor had suffered 12 different injuries/wounds on various parts of the body and “all are antemortem (prior to death) except one injury”.

Although the body was found 11 days after his disappearance, the autopsy report stated that the five-year-old had died “approximately four to five days” before the post-mortem examination, casting doubts on the police’s efforts to recover him.

According to Sahil, a non-profit organisation, kidnapping was among the top crimes that led to child sexual abuse followed by cases of rape and sodomy. In most of the crimes committed against children, abusers were related or known to the children or the family, it deduced.

In its ‘Cruel Numbers’ report for January to June 2024, Sahil found that children between the ages of five and 15 were at high risk of sexual abuse and pornography, most of them boys.

Crimes against boys across Sindh



Source: Sindh Child Protection Agency

Police surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed also noticed a similar trend. “Children brought dead to us are mostly boys as compared to girls and they are under the ages of five and six years ... boys are now at a greater risk today than let’s say five years ago,” she told Dawn.com.

Advocate Mehdi explained why boys were now more vulnerable. “We have not developed a level of sanity regarding children,” he said.

“Let’s say a boy is going somewhere with someone, no one will stop him in the area. But if that child is a girl, everyone will be concerned. This factor makes boys more vulnerable and easy traps because society doesn’t look at them in that way.”

The Sahil report further highlighted that children, particularly boys, were also more vulnerable to internal trafficking — when a person is taken from one city to another without their consent for “compelled labour” or “commercial sex acts” as per the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018 or TIP Act — a trend widely reported in urban areas such as Karachi and Lahore.

The aforementioned law says that the police are responsible for investigating such offences. However, if the crime involves transporting a victim into or out of Pakistan, the responsibility shifts to the Federal Investigation Authority.

According to data available with Dawn.com, of the 30 child kidnapping cases registered in the South Zone between July and December 2024, three invoked the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018. In districts Korangi and East, 14 and five FIRs, respectively, were registered under the TIP Act.

Sometimes, children also deliberately leave their homes over arguments or other reasons. In such cases, it becomes difficult to find the child because they remove the tracks of their recovery themselves; they are explicitly trying not to be found.

On the other hand, Imtiaz Soomro, a lawyer who works with Sahil, said that data showed girls were usually kidnapped for child marriage and child prostitution.

Six-month data obtained by Dawn.com, July to December 2024, from across Karachi showed that a majority of child kidnapping cases were registered in the Central district under section 365-B of the Pakistan Penal Code which pertains to kidnapping, abduction or inducing a woman to compel for marriage. A similar trend followed in the Korangi district.

Talking about Sarim’s case, SSP Zeeshan said that the FIR invoked Section 364-A of the Pakistan Penal Code which pertains to kidnapping or abducting a person under the age of 14. He noted that the case had various facets.

“Initially, the police were searching for him outside of his apartment complex because we didn’t have CCTV footage from the time he went missing (due to an electricity breakdown),” the cop said. “But after his body was found, the investigation is now back within the boundaries of his muhalla.”

He insisted that the police were working objectively on the case. “Parents can’t ever be satisfied,” he added.

When will the state act?

Sarim’s funeral was held the same day his body was found. His father was adamant; no more delays. The five-year-old boy was laid to rest at the Muhammad Shah graveyard, near Shadman. When Pervez returned home from the cemetery, he and his wife took sleeping pills and went to bed.

“But I woke up in the middle of the night and everything came back,” the father said. “The one thing that got stuck in my mind was the fact that Sarim was alive for at least four days before he was killed.”

“He could have been saved. He could have been among us,” Pervez rued. “How many children have to die for the state to act?”

We have legislation and case laws, we have courts, and Pakistan is even a signatory to UN rights conventions and treaties on child protection. Why are law enforcers unable to save children?

Because of the lack of implementation of these laws and rules, said Soomro.

“There are no gaps in our legal system, and these crimes have tough punishments, yet, the conviction rate remains low,” he pointed out, holding the police responsible for increasing acquittals in such cases. The lawyer highlighted that Justice Athar Minallah, in a 2019 judgment at the Islamabad High Court, had ruled that child abuse cases needed to be investigated by police officers of the assistant superintendent of police (ASP) rank and above.

“But in how many cases have you seen it being implemented? The police have a typical investigation style and are unaware of basic laws,” he lamented. “We don’t see the state respond until and unless it’s a case that has garnered the media’s attention.”

But what is the police’s investigation process when it comes to such cases? Dawn.com spoke to a serving police officer, who wished to remain anonymous. He explained that when it comes to missing children, a mechanism hardly exists because the manual on legal action in such cases was missing. Hence, they were rarely a priority.

Unlike the UK or USA, where a special department was responsible for the investigation and recovery of missing people, in Pakistan, there was no such apparatus. However, there were some usual steps that the police followed; increased patrolling, community involvement and missing alerts.

Advocate Mehdi agreed, highlighting the need to improve the prosecution system — police investigation and court adjudication. “If the investigating officer is not trained, there will be lacunas in the case and these crimes will continue to persist,” he said.

He stressed that the only way to improve prosecution was to include education related to the existing laws in the curriculum at police training centres and academies. Moreover, a special police unit should be established, equipped with the special expertise to investigate cases related to child protection.

At the same time, exclusive child courts must also be established.

“Unfortunately, we only have a single court which is dealing with all kinds of cases. An experiment was done in Karachi a few years back where child courts were established in Malir and City but their condition is not the best. The exclusivity that we were seeking in the dealing of children cases was not seen there,” Mehdi added.

The Supreme Court has also emphasised the same. In a 2024 judgment, the apex body asked the state to fulfil its obligation of setting up child-friendly courts under specially trained professional judges as the welfare and interest of minors should be the foundational principle in cases pertaining to children.

“It is the duty of the courts to assess and determine a course that would have served the best interest of the minors,” Justice Minallah observed, adding that children were vulnerable and traumatic experiences early in life could leave lifelong scars which could affect the quality of their lives.

Exposure of a child to the environment generally prevalent in ordinary courts could profoundly affect their impressionable minds, he noted. Moreover, insensitivity or lack of special expertise on the part of presiding judges in such matters could gravely affect the children’s rights and thus impact their lives adversely.

Courage is all it takes

On the other hand, child protection expert Valerie Khan Yousafzai highlighted that there was a dire need to mobilise the community in a healthy, gender-responsive, child-centric and inclusive manner.

“We should have a child protection committee in every locality. People have good intentions in our country, it is easy to mobilise them when it comes to protecting children and providing them with a haven,” she emphasised.

But community engagement could never be unguided. They needed to be told how to do it as per child protection standards; you don’t want vigilante groups, you want child protection groups. And all of this was the state’s responsibility.

One example to do so is to engage mosques, where announcements are made when a child goes missing. This, Valerie said, increased the chances of recovery.

“But this is not being used or invested in adequately by the state,” she regretted, pointing out that the government’s focus was on the retributive approach — death penalties and punishments. “We need to have the courage to be technical and take an evidence-based route where we use data that science is showing us, which talks about rehabilitation and prevention.”

“How many reformatory, rehabilitative and reintegrative treatments do we have for the perpetrators?”

Meanwhile, Farooq underscored the importance of educating society, children, and parents. Children must be taught to memorise the phone numbers of either of their parents from a young age. This would lead to earlier reunions.

“There are so many cases where children are at shelter homes and their parents keep searching for them,” he said, “but they are unable to reunite because the children are unable to communicate.”

Secondly, it was now time that the world moved away from good and bad touch to “no touch”, Farooq stressed, adding that no form of touch should be allowed because the definition of good and bad had changed over time. Furthermore, children, especially those under the age of 10, should not be allowed to leave their homes without supervision.

These dos and don’ts are not just important inside homes but also at schools, where a child spends most of their time. Unfortunately, in our society, abuse and exploitation are stigmatised with honour, hence, conversation is missing from the social discourse.

But despite what the parents and society could do and continues to do, the reality is that children are being kidnapped, raped, trafficked, abused and killed. According to a police report released in November last year, the whereabouts of over 230 children — who were either kidnapped or went missing from January to September 2023 in Karachi — were still unknown.

At Sarim's house, the air is dense, everyone thinks about him, but no one is brave enough to speak up. The unannounced expectation that 'life must go on' weighs heavy, heavier than grief. "We have other children to look after ... we can't lose them," said Pervez.

Aariz, the eldest brother, is now accompanied to the madrassah by his mother every day, who waits at the nearby park with other women, who have started doing the same. At home, the grandmother keeps a close watch on the youngest son, Azfar.

A month and a half after Sarim was killed, his perpetrators remain at large.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 25, 2025

Pakistan still ‘partly free’ in political rights, civil liberties but drops 3 points

As freedom declined around the world last year, Pakistan was ranked “partly free” by Freedom House and declined three points in conditions for political rights and civil liberties in the organisation’s annual report.

Global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year in 2024, according to Freedom House, a Washington DC-based organisation that tracks democracy and threats to freedom around the world.

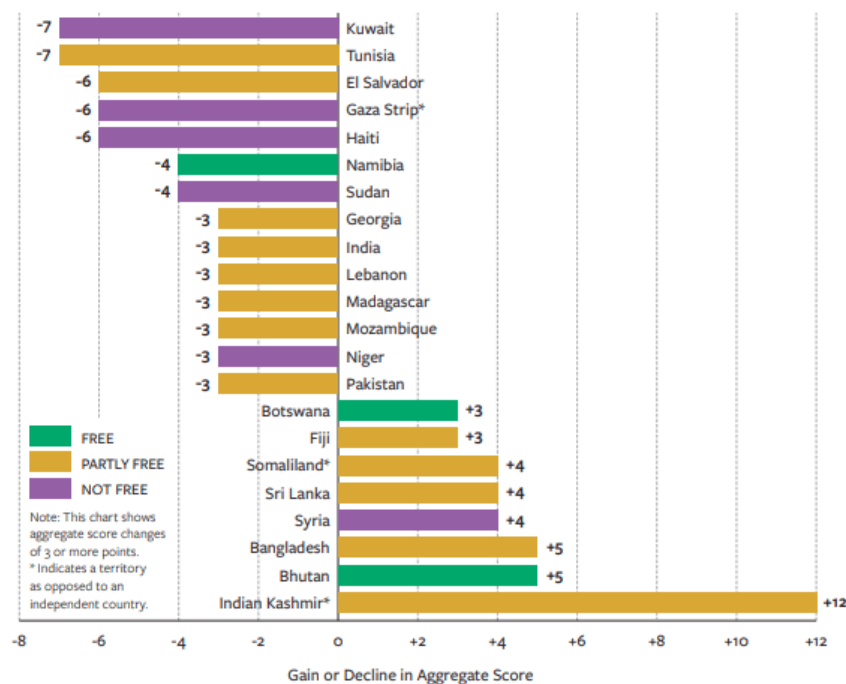
People experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties in 60 countries, and secured improvements in only 34 countries, the Freedom House report said.

“In settings where conditions worsened, key factors driving the degradation in rights and liberties included violence and the repression of political opponents during elections, ongoing armed conflicts, and the spread of authoritarian practices,” it said.

Pakistan was ranked “partly free” and declined three points from the year prior. The points reflected conditions for political and civil liberties in a country.

LARGEST ONE-YEAR GAINS AND DECLINES IN 2024

Gains in aggregate score reflect improvements in conditions for political rights and civil liberties.



Pakistan was also ranked among the countries with the largest 10-year declines in freedom and declined by 10 points. The country with the greatest 10-year decline was Nicaragua (40 points), Tunisia (35 points) and El Salvador (28 points). The organisation noted that 2024 was marred by violence and repression around elections, ongoing armed conflicts, and the spread of authoritarian practices, all of which contributed to the decline of global freedom.

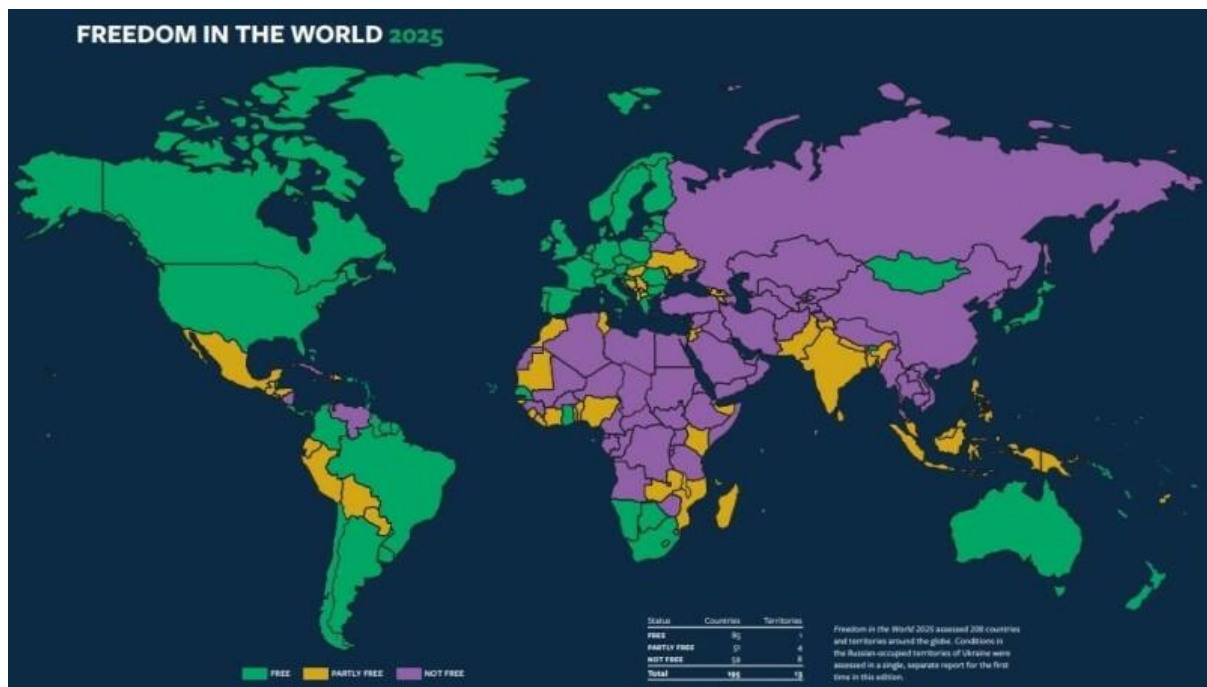
South Asian bright spots amid global freedom decline

The Washington-based pro-democracy research group elevated two countries to the status of “free” — Senegal, where the opposition triumphed after the outgoing president’s attempt to delay elections was defeated, and Bhutan, the Himalayan kingdom which consolidated a transition to democracy with competitive polls.

Tiny Bhutan gained the distinction of being the only South Asian country classified as free.

But others in the region made strong gains in the index without changing categories — Bangladesh, where iron-fisted leader Sheikh Hasina fled in the face of a revolt, and Sri Lanka, where Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected president on an anti-corruption platform after breaking the stranglehold of the two long-dominant parties.

The largest score improvement in the index, which tracks both countries and territories, was in Indian-held Kashmir, which held elections for the first time since the Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi revoked the Muslim-majority region’s special status in 2019.



But Freedom House said India as a whole saw further deterioration as it pointed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to gain influence over judicial appointments. The group downgraded the world's largest democracy from "free" to "partly free" in 2021.

Yana Gorokhovskaia, the co-author of the report, said it was the 19th consecutive year that freedom fell on a global level, but that 2024 was especially volatile due to the high number of elections. "The big picture is that this was another year of the same trajectory of a global decline in freedom but because of all the elections, it was more dynamic than previous years," she said. She said that both Bangladesh and Syria, where rebel fighters toppled longtime strongman Bashar al-Assad in December, saw immediate improvements in civil liberties — but that it would be a longer road to see gains in political representation.

Political rights largely "depend on institutions. And those are easy to destroy but very hard to build up," she said.

Four countries become 'not free'

A rare bright spot in the Middle East was Jordan, which was upgraded from "not free" to "partly free." Freedom House pointed to reforms that allowed more competitive elections in the kingdom.

On the other hand, four countries were downgraded from "partly free" to "not free" — Kuwait, Niger, Tanzania, and Thailand.

Thailand — which has repeatedly shifted in the Freedom House categories — saw a court disband the party which won the most votes in elections and then dismiss the prime minister from the second-ranking party after an ethics complaint by senators backed by the powerful military.

Kuwait's emir disbanded parliament after elections, while in Tanzania, Freedom House pointed to a crackdown on protesters under President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Niger came under the full grip of the military after a 2023 coup ousted elected president Mohamed Bazoum.

Tunisia, El Salvador and Haiti also saw steep declines. The only country given a perfect 100 score on freedom was Finland, with New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden all right behind at 99.

Freedom House, founded in 1941 with bipartisan US support, receives US government funding but is independently administered. The non-profit group has planned layoffs after President Donald Trump froze money aimed at democracy promotion.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

Forgotten inmates

PAKISTAN'S jails are an embarrassment to any notion of justice and rehabilitation.

A report prepared by the National Commission for Human Rights, National Academy for Prisons Administration, and Justice Project Pakistan describes the appalling conditions prisoners have to endure: there are more than 102,000 of them crammed into spaces built for fewer than 66,000. In Punjab, prisons are at a staggering 173.6pc of their capacity, while Karachi Central Jail operates at an overwhelming 355pc overcapacity. Three-quarters of inmates remain under trial, caught in an endless legal limbo.

Despite some attempts at reform, Pakistan's prison system has seen little meaningful change. Punjab has led infrastructural expansions, constructing 13 new jails since 2010, yet the province still houses 61,813 prisoners in facilities meant for 37,217. Meanwhile, Sindh, KP, and Balochistan lag behind, relying on outdated facilities and policies that fail to ease congestion.

The 2022 amendment to the Control of Narcotic Substances Act has exacerbated overcrowding by eliminating parole and probation options for drug offenders. Nearly 30pc of Punjab's prisoners consists of individuals convicted of drug-related crimes, many serving disproportionately long sentences. Shockingly, while conviction rates for narcotics cases plummeted to just 2pc in Punjab in 2023, incarceration rates soared.

It is a broken system: poor sanitation, malnutrition, and a lack of healthcare create inhumane conditions, with prisoners often forced to sleep in shifts due to overcrowding. And it breeds a mental health crisis where individuals with psychosocial disabilities are detained indefinitely, subjected to abuse and medical neglect. The tragic case of Khizar Hayat, a mentally ill prisoner who died chained to a hospital bed, is just one among many.

Solutions are not unknown. Sindh and KP have updated their legal frameworks for prisons. However, Punjab and Balochistan have stalled on key reforms, with Punjab yet to implement its Draft Prison Rules, 2022, which could improve prisoner welfare significantly. Most prisoners do not need to be behind bars; community service and alternative sentencing must be introduced as viable options.

Moreover, the undertrial prisoner population can be thinned out with bail reforms and expedited court proceedings. An important element to consider is independent oversight. The NCHR should be empowered to conduct surprise inspections and establish an independent prisoner complaint mechanism. Vocational training and education must be

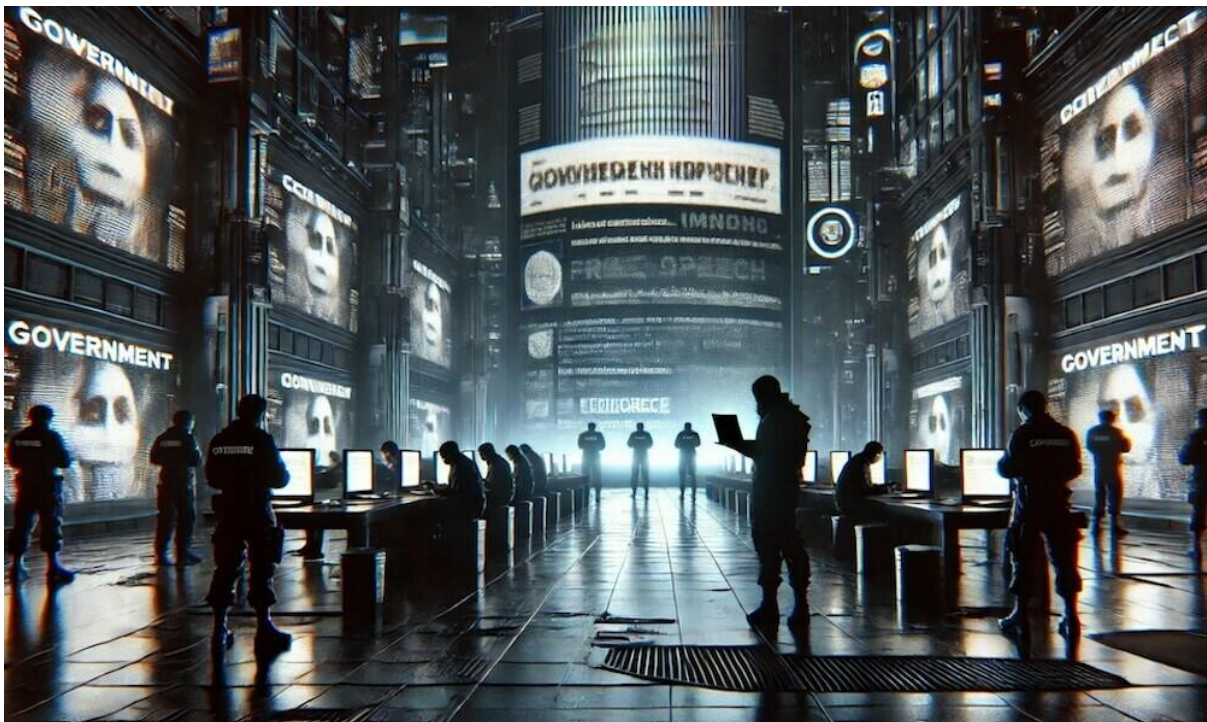
integrated into prison management to provide meaningful rehabilitation. Diversion programmes are needed for minor offences and people with psychosocial disabilities should receive treatment rather than be jailed.

A civilised society does not lock people away and forget them. Our prison crisis demands more than committees and reports. The need of the hour is political will and implementation of the proposals that have accumulated over decades.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

The Peca tweaks are aimed at combating disinformation free speech. Here’s why they may also be unconstitutional

AREEBA KHAN



When the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) was originally promulgated in 2016, it was done under the pretext of tackling disinformation to preserve public peace. However, it didn’t take long for everyone to realise that this was one of the most consequential expansions of state control over free expression in Pakistan’s history.

Almost nine years on, the state’s attempts at reigning in dissent on the digital space continue with as much zeal — with the latest amendments to Peca not only granting sweeping powers to the executive, but also setting in a new wave of concerns for freedom of speech, judicial oversight as well as due process.

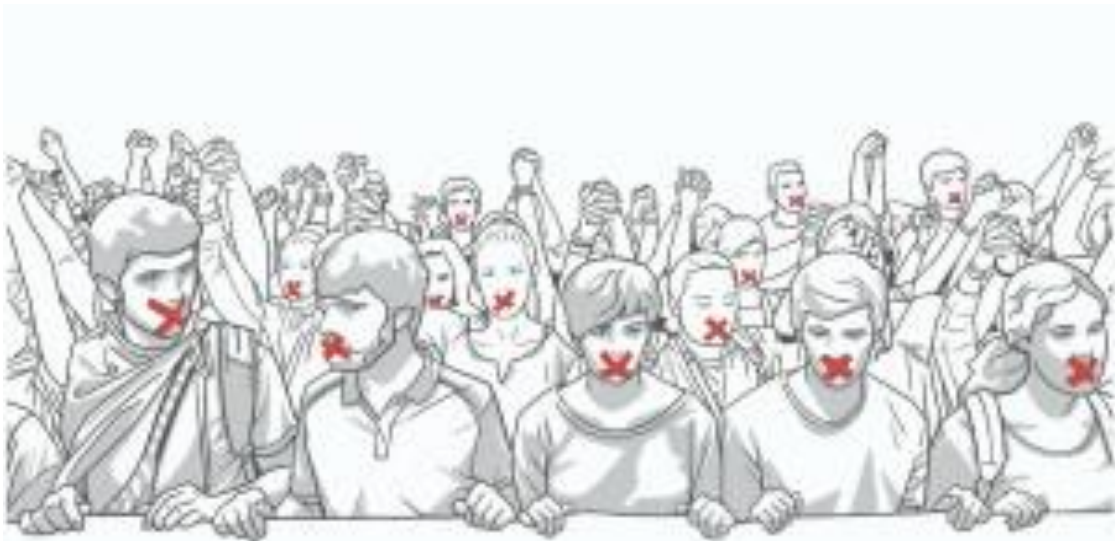
A constitutional quagmire

At the foot of the controversy relating to the latest Peca amendment lies the ambiguous definition of ‘disinformation’. The term, as defined in the law, not only grants the state

boundless discretionary powers to regulate content online, but also creates a path for arbitrary enforcement, permitting regulatory bodies to decide what qualifies as ‘disinformation’. This can only mean more censorship of political dissent, investigative journalism and even satire.

The amendment itself directly contradicts Article 19 of the Constitution, where freedom of speech is subject only to ‘reasonable restrictions’ — such as in the interest of national security — which the Peca amendment fundamentally fails to do. It simply does not meet the established legal standards of necessity and proportionality for a restriction to be deemed ‘reasonable’.

In the legal context, freedom of speech has been continuously reaffirmed as a foundational democratic right that cannot be restricted arbitrarily. In the *Benazir Bhutto v Federation of Pakistan* PLD 1988 SC 416, the apex court underscored that any limitation on any democratic right must “not be used as a tool of oppression”. Both the original Peca law from 2016 and the latest amendment negate this principle with their expansive language, allowing the government to prosecute individuals for vague offences without even requiring proof of harm or malicious intent, as the restrictions imposed are neither clearly defined nor proportionate to the harm they seek to prevent.



Project Peca I: How to silence a nation

Further, the rule of legal certainty (*nullum crimen sine lege* — no crime without law) sets down the principle that criminal laws should be clear, specific and predictable. And yet, the Peca amendment infringes upon this core legal protection by using terms like “false information” and “incitement” without legally defining them.

This leads to a theoretical problem. Under these amendments, a social media post challenging the state narrative could attract up to three years in prison or a crippling penalty of Rs2 million.

But who exactly decides what qualifies as “false information” if it is not held up to a legal standard? A government-appointed authority with no judicial oversight? Does this not mean that this law does not really regulate speech — it regulates opposition? Besides, why exactly is there a need for yet another law covering “false information” when the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and defamation laws contain clear statutory provisions on false statements, slander and libel?

These questions indicate that the Peca amendment does not fill a legal gap — it inherently creates a new tool for oppression. Since these amendments have been challenged in court, it is difficult to see how the government will justify why these duplicative, overly broad and vague criminal provisions are necessary. Courts have previously required laws to be narrowly customised to prevent abuse, and the Peca amendment’s ambiguity fails this basic test.

Moreover, the Peca amendment is not just bad law, it is an outright attack on the right to fair trial enshrined in Article 10-A of the Constitution. With the creation of new regulatory bodies such as the Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA), the Social Media Protection Tribunal (SMPT), and the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency (NCCIA), the law strips the judiciary of its constitutional role and places these unchecked powers of removing content, imposing penalties and deciding cases without any traditional judicial oversight, in the hands of the bureaucracy — positioning themselves to be the judge, jury and executioner.

This also raises a fundamental due process concern: if the tribunals are not independent of the influence of the government, their rulings will only be politically motivated. Given Pakistan’s history of politically motivated prosecutions and media oppression, there is every reason to believe that these bodies will serve as tools for further suppression, which clearly is not a hypothetical risk, but an inherent design flaw that enables government overreach.

Rule by decree

There is a clear historical pattern here — starting from the regulations of the Press and Publications Ordinance (1963) and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, laws have consistently been used to silence the opposition, regulate media narratives and limit ‘unfavourable’ reporting. Extending these controls into the digital sphere, Peca 2025 entrenches and perpetuates a culture of censorship that is legally indefensible under the Constitution.

This expansion of state control over digital expression can actually be seen from the time Peca was enacted and implemented. Even before these amendments, state and non-state actors depended on extralegal means to silence criticism from the public. In 2017, five bloggers ‘vanished’ after allegedly posting content critical of state institutional policies. Though the bloggers were not formally charged under Peca, it was clear that speech on digital platforms was under strict surveillance and the state could exact retribution without due process. These amendments mirror the technique used in 2017, accelerating the surveillance of digital platforms so as to limit speech.

Worse still, the surveillance and punitive measures are compounded by the absence of efficient appellate mechanisms. Under traditional legal principles, individuals, as well as media entities, have the right to challenge decisions in lower courts before proceeding to the highest court. Peca cripples this right by mandating that the appeal may be filed exclusively to the Supreme Court, an institution which does not function as a routine appellate body. This in itself creates an unreasonable burden on citizens, as appealing to the highest court is financially, procedurally and logistically out of reach for most individuals.

As an apex body, the Supreme Court is meant to hear constitutional matters, not serve as the first and the only court of appeal for every citizen targeted under draconian laws. The apex court has continuously overturned executive overreach, most notably in *Suo Moto Case No. 5 of 2012 (Memogate Scandal)* PLD 2012 SC 553, where it held against the unlawful concentration of power to non-judicial bodies.

It seems that the Peca amendment’s judicial overreach is likely to be struck down, but until then, it may create a system where faceless government bodies jeopardise careers, silence dissent, and punish individuals. This is not the rule of law — it is rule by decree and the amendment is a direct assault on due process, and possibly even the death of fair trials.

Muzzling the press

In light of the constitutional issues highlighted above, it would be safe to say that the Peca amendment is a direct assault on press freedom. This is exactly why there has been significant uproar over the amendment by journalists, with the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists even challenging the same in the Islamabad High Court.

Being a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Pakistan is obligated to protect freedom of expression, only restricting it in cases where there is incitement to violence or genuine national security threats — both requiring strict legal safeguards and judicial oversight. Without an objective legal standard for “false information”, Peca directly contradicts these obligations, exposing the country to potential scrutiny under international human rights law.

The Peca amendment also doesn't help the country's image when it comes to press freedoms, with Pakistan already ranking a dismal 152 out of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index in 2024. With the latest Peca amendment, journalists and content creators now run the risk of being persecuted over a single investigative report critical of government institutions, a satirical tweet or even an expose on corruption.

Courts worldwide have struck down laws that create a “chilling effect” on free speech. The US Supreme Court in the *New York Times vs Sullivan* 376 US254 (1964) ruled that imprudent legal restrictions on journalism stifle public debate and undermine democracy. The Peca amendment does create this “chilling effect”.

In fact, even before the Peca amendment, the ban on X, the crackdown on VPNs, and other social media platforms signalled a warning: the state wanted complete control over the digital space.

Enabling authorities to shut down news channels, limiting access to encrypted communication, and punishing whistleblowers under the guise of restraining ‘false information’ are all signs that Pakistan is now dangerously close to replicating China's and Iran's digital authoritarianism, where the state determines what information the public is allowed to consume. Ultimately, a free press is the cornerstone of any democratic society, which the Peca amendment seeks to fracture beyond repair.

Beyond the obvious contentions detailed above, the Peca amendment is also an economic disaster waiting to happen. No serious tech company would want to invest in a country where the digital economy and landscape seem to be struggling, with the added burden of potential excessive penalties and a compliance regime bordering on near-complete censorship.

In an era where the world is competing for digital innovation, be it in FinTech or economic transformations, Pakistan is still debating the basic right to free speech.

Fortunately, there is still time to reverse the process if the courts intervene promptly. The real question is whether we, as a nation, are willing to accept a future where speaking the truth is a crime, journalism is at its weakest due to fear of persecution and silence is the only option.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 28, 2025