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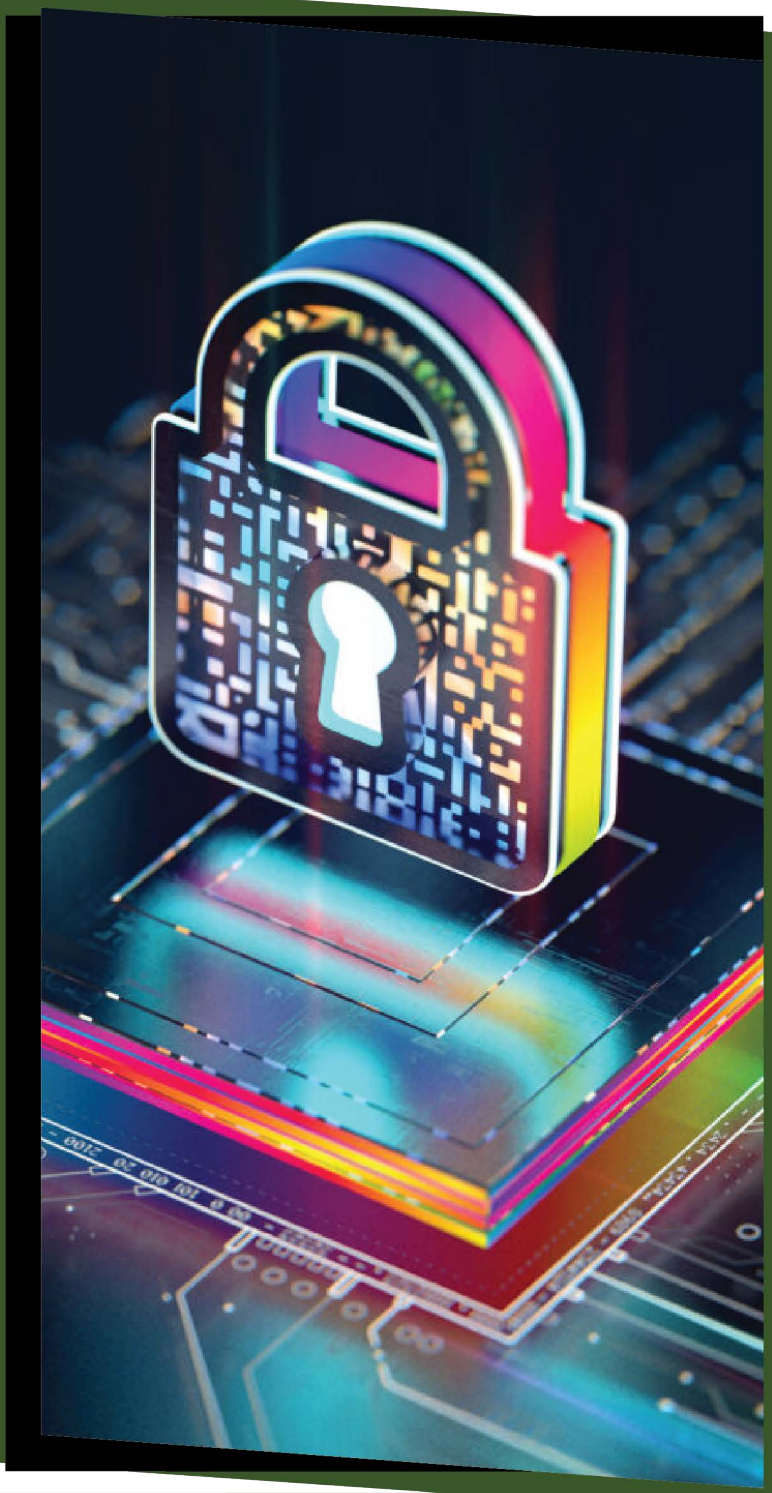

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7 terrorists killed in Balochistan IBOs

QUETTA: Security forces killed seven terrorists in two separate operations conducted in Kachhi and Kalat districts of Balochis-tan, the military's media wing said.

The operations were ca-r-ried out on June 2 based on intelligence rep-orts regarding the prese-nce of terrorists in the areas.

"An intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted in general area Mach of Kachhi district on reported presence of Fitna al Hindustan terrorists," the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. During the operation, it added, troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location, and after an intense exchange of fire, five Indian-sponsored terrorists were sent to hell.

It said that in another IBO conducted in general area Margand of Kalat district, "a Fitna al Hindustan terrorist hideout was busted and two Fitna al Hindustan terrorists were successfully neutralised".

"Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the killed Fitna al Hindustan terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities," ISPR statement said.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace Indian-sponsored terrorism from the country and reaffirm the nation's unwavering resolve to bring the perpetrators of Indian-sponsored terrorism and their facilitators to justice," it added.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 4, 2025

Passports of 7,800 deportees being cancelled

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has initiated the process of cancelling passports of more than 7,800 citizens who were deported from different countries because of their involvement in beggary and other illegal activities abroad.

"As many as 7,873 Pakistanis have been deported from 2019 to 2025 on several accounts. Around 5,600 of them have been deported on account of beggary from Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar, as per the data received from the Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) and Pakistan Missions Abroad. The Ministry of Interior has put the names of deportees on the Passport Control List (PCL)," top officials from the ministries of interior and overseas Pakistanis informed the Senate committee.

Officials further informed the committee that the government has initiated the cancellation of the passports of all deportees to discourage the growing trend of beggary, which is reportedly being committed by some Pakistan nationals in Gulf countries besides being involved in other illegal activities.

The Senate Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development was especially convened at the Parliament House to discuss the issue of deportees and the action taken against them due to their involvement in illegal activities abroad. Senator Zeeshan Khanzada presided over the meeting.

The Senate panel was further informed that about 1,460 deportees had gone abroad through 691 Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs).

Senator Zamir Hussain Ghumro inquired about the steps taken by the government for preventing beggary and other crimes, which has brought disgrace to the nation and the country's image. Senator Shahadat Awan claimed that the passport of an individual could not be cancelled for the crime committed abroad or outside the territorial jurisdiction of Pakistan.

The committee also inquired about the action taken against the OEPs involved in sending deportees abroad. Officials stated that the ministry has issued show-cause notices to those involved. It recommended that criminal proceedings be initiated against the OEPs along with direction to provide details of OEPs who sent the maximum number of Pakistanis abroad who were later found to have been involved in beggary and other criminal activities earning humiliation for Pakistan and disrupting friendly relations with the brotherly countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The Director General of Passport and Immigration, Mustafa Jamal Kazi, informed the committee about the growing trend of overstaying by the Pakistanis visiting Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq for

pilgrimage. Last year alone, he said, around 34,000 Pakistanis were deported from Iran and around 50,000 others from Iraq.

He also highlighted the increasing trend of Pakistani nationals seeking asylum in Euro-pean countries.

He told the committee that around 125,000 people have sought asylum in European countries in the last year or so.

The managing director of the Overseas Employment Corporation apprised the committee that around 10.3 million Pakistani skilled workers are employed in various countries.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 4, 2025

Pakistan busts German-led global child abuse ring

State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry addresses a news conference in the federal capital.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has unearthed a disturbing international child exploitation network operating from Muzaffargarh, allegedly led by a German national named Renz.

The revelation was made by State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry during a joint press conference in Islamabad, alongside NCCIA Director General Dr Syed Waqaruddin Syed.

According to officials, the network targeted children between the ages of six and ten, most of whom belonged to extremely poor families. A so-called "children's club" was reportedly set up as a front to attract victims.

The facility featured advanced equipment, including high-quality cameras, lighting, and recording tools.

Minister Chaudhry revealed that children were initially given money and later blackmailed into exploitation. The videos were filmed in a studio-like environment and sold on the dark web for thousands of dollars per day.

The German suspect is said to have travelled to Pakistan for 28 days, during which he trained local operators and established the setup.

"This was not just a local case. This was an international operation being run from within Pakistan," the minister said. "We have confirmed that this gang was creating and distributing live content globally."

A major raid was conducted by the NCCIA on May 23, with support from local police and intelligence agencies. The operation led to the rescue of at least six children, who were handed over to the Punjab Child Protection Bureau. In total, more than 50 children were identified as victims.

So far, authorities have registered 178 First Information Reports (FIRs) related to child exploitation. Fourteen individuals have already been sentenced to seven to ten years in prison.

Two suspects linked to this particular case were arrested during the raid, while three remain at large. Efforts are underway to locate and apprehend them.

Some parents of the victims were also found to be complicit in the abuse, either knowingly or by accepting money.

"It is heartbreaking to say that in some cases, even the parents were part of this horrific business," said the minister.

The NCCIA acted on intelligence received from the U.S.-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Interpol. The agency operates a 24/7 monitoring system and collaborates with international organisations to track and prevent online crimes against children.

Dr Waqaruddin added that hundreds of videos were recovered from the studio, many of which had already been shared via encrypted platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram, and later sold on the dark web.

"This is a major breakthrough. It's the first time such a large, organised international network has been exposed and disrupted in Pakistan," said the DG. "We are working closely with Interpol and German authorities to trace and arrest the foreign suspects."

He also highlighted that Pakistan is now among the 71 countries with access to Interpol's global databases, which has significantly accelerated investigation and international cooperation.

Minister Chaudhry stressed that recent amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) have increased punishments for child exploitation crimes from seven to ten years, to fourteen to twenty years.

The offences are now categorised as non-bailable and non-compoundable.

"We are taking this matter very seriously," he said. "The Prime Minister and Interior Minister have been briefed, and we are seeking funds to expand NCCIA offices across the country. We want a strong cybercrime unit in every district of Pakistan."

The minister concluded by appealing to the media and civil society to support efforts against online child abuse.

"This is not just the government's fight. It is a fight for our children, our future, and our moral responsibility."

Source: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 4, 2025

45pc of Pakistanis live below poverty line: WB

Under WB's old definition of $2.15 per capita threshold for low-income countries, 4.9pc of Pakistan's population was considered living in extreme poverty.

ISLAMABAD: Almost forty-five per cent of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line, according to a World Bank report.

The finding, based on a survey conducted in 2018-19, comes in the wake of an update of global poverty lines made by the bank, and not because of any change in underlying economic conditions across the world.

The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has risen from 4.9pc to 16.5pc, according to the report.

The latest findings come in the wake of World Bank's update of global poverty lines and not because of any change in the underlying economic conditions across the world.

"For Pakistan, the poverty rate based on the new $3 international poverty line (IPL) under 2021 purchasing power parity (PPP) is 16.5Pc, compared to 4.9pc under the previous $2.15 line (2017 PPP)," said the World Bank.

About 82pc of this increase is due to the higher value of the new IPL, reflecting increases in the national poverty lines of comparator countries, with the rest explained by price increases in Pakistan between 2017 and 2021 reflected in the updated PPPs, it added.

"The poverty rate under the $4.20 IPL line rose from 39.8pc to 44.7pc" in Pakistan, the bank said. It added that the new IPL affected the level of poverty only, but trends in poverty remain unchanged.

Old definition

Under the World Bank's old definition of $2.15 per capita threshold for low income countries (LICs), 4.9pc of Pakistan's population was considered living in extreme poverty. The percentage has now surged to 16.5 with the new threshold of $3 per day under the same 2018-19 survey. Pakistan has not conducted household income survey since then.

Measured by $4.2 per capita income for lower middle income countries (LMICs), the poverty rate in Pakistan has increased to 44.7pc from 39.8pc estimated earlier at $3.65 per day, explained Christine Wieser, a World Bank poverty expert, at a news conference here.

She said Pakistan's poverty and resilience assessment (PERA), currently in progress, would provide the latest update on actual poverty situation on the ground and explore drivers and dimensions of trends in poverty and welfare over the past 20 years.

The findings, due in September this year, would also have special deep dives on spatial disparities and fiscal equity.

Ms Wieser said the poverty rate in Pakistan was up 88.4pc, based on $8.30 a day — the poverty line meant for upper middle income countries (UMICs).

Earlier, 84.5pc Pakistanis fell in this category at the old threshold of $6.85 a day.

The bank changed its global poverty lines to reflect changes in the cost of living and consumption habits of people around the world, based on newly available data. The new poverty lines are $3 per person per day for low income countries, $4.2 for lower-middle-income countries, and $8.3 for upper-middle-income countries.

These lines are based on 2021 purchasing power parity rates, as well as updated national poverty lines.

In reply to a question whether this meant policy formulations were misplaced, Ms Wieser said countries used their own national poverty lines and surveys to monitor the evolution of poverty and guide anti-poverty policies and investments.

Significant shift

Pakistan is among the countries experiencing the largest changes in poverty when transitioning to the 2021 PPPs based on the Low-Income International Poverty Line. This significant shift in poverty rates under the LIC line, compared to the LMIC and Upper-Middle-Income Country (UMIC) lines, is

due to a concentration of households with welfare levels between $PPP2.15 and $PPP3, which is near the International Poverty Line.

The revision in global poverty lines "does not suggest that poverty in Pakistan has worsened as living standards of the population have not changed to what was previously reported", Ms Wieser said.

The change in international poverty rates merely reflected a higher threshold for being "non-poor", based on improved consumption measurement across low-income countries; changes to LMIC and UMIC lines, where data is of a relatively high quality, may reflect an increase in the value of poverty lines as countries become richer.

However, because national poverty lines differ widely, the resulting poverty rates are not comparable internationally.

International Poverty Line

To enable cross-country comparisons, the World Bank introduced the "$1-a-day" International Poverty Line (IPL) in 1990. This benchmark was based on the average national poverty lines of the world's 15 poorest countries at the time, adjusted using purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates to account for differences in the cost of living.

It was revised to $1.25 per day in 2005, $1.90 in 2011, and $2.15 in 2017. The most recent update, using 2021 PPPs, sets the low-income country (LIC) IPL at $3 a day — a 40pc increase.

Sixty per cent of the increase in IPL is due to higher national poverty lines, while 40pc is due to a rise in prices between 2017 and 2021. Moreover, the lower-middle income (LMIC) IPL is set at $4.2 per day (from $3.65), an increase of roughly 15pc. The upper middle-income line is set at $8.3 per day (from $6.85) an increase of roughly 20pc, in 2021 PPPs.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 6, 2025

Bruised innocence

EVERY revelation of child sexual abuse is another nail in a society's coffin. Abhorrent paedophile activity has rocked Pakistan often, yet no lessons are learnt. Thanks to a tip-off from the US-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, authorities in Punjab have busted another international child exploitation network, this time operating in a Muzaffargarh gaming club. Children between six and 10 years were abused and filmed; their videos were then sold on the dark web. Hair-raising details from the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency reveal that 50 children were trapped in the porn racket run by a German citizen. While some children were rescued and suspects were arrested, the fact that this is yet another instance of predators accessing children from poor backgrounds shows the inability of the authorities to nip such a crime in the bud.

Sexual grooming implies a gradual process of strangers or people known to, mostly, minors gaining the trust of their potential victim through friendly behaviour or enticements. They go on to manipulate the emotions of their young victims and condition them to accept sexual abuse, using graphic material to maintain control. The crisis is exacerbated by the incompetence and corruption of those tasked with safeguarding the most vulnerable, unimplemented laws, a defective criminal justice system and political abandonment. In addition, mechanisms such as the Zainab Alert App have faded from collective memory. The public and media must unite to hold those in power accountable so that the nexus between privilege and porn rings is torn down. Besides, education is a great defence. Raped, trafficked, and turned into child pornography fodder, Pakistan's innocent are easy prey. Sadly, Punjab's delayed child protection policy is proof of flawed political priorities. The recent episode again exposes the dangers of a scourge, with global dimensions. Reticence in this moment signals the moral death of a nation.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 10, 2025

CM's 'red line seems to have blurred' with low conviction in abuse cases

LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's initiative of protecting the women and children from violence, abuse and harassment suffered a major setback as only 924 suspects nominated in total 60,217 cases registered in all the districts during 2024 got punishments from courts while 2,388 were 'acquitted', with Lahore police's performance at its worst.

The official figures revealed that the suspects acquitted in the cases were more than double in number as compared to those convicted by the courts.

A majority of the suspects escaped punishments due to the 'gross negligence' on the part of the Punjab police as faulty investigations, lack of evidence and weak challans were largely attributed to the pathetically low conviction rate in crimes against women and children in Punjab.

Resultantly, sufferings of the rape victims increased manifold when a majority of the suspects nominated by them escaped punishments from the courts of law.

Some experts believed that the punishment to a meagre number of accused persons showed that the performance of the Punjab police's senior command was restricted largely to the registration of the victims' complaints only.

They said the police officers have been applying decades-old tactics of satisfying the CM by 'presenting a maximum number of registered crime figures' and shifting blame for low conviction rate to courts.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in many high-level meetings had declared the violence against women her 'red line' and conveyed categorically to Punjab police chief Dr Usman Anwar that she wanted to break the myth that they were weak part of the society and will not tolerate any negligence in this respect.

According to an official report, the Punjab police's Special Sexual Offences Investigation Unit (SSOIU) had investigated a total of 60,217 cases of violence, abuse and harassment against women and children registered in Punjab in 2024.

Most crimes were related to the sexual assault on women and children and their kidnap for ulterior motives. Many incidents of child pornography, cruelty and sexual abuse have also been reported in parts of the province. As per the report, the SSOIU had divided the heinous crimes in Schedule-I and Schedule-II.

The specialised unit was dealing with 13 various offences of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) listed in Schedule-I besides others lodged under anti-terrorism act 1997.

Primarily, they included section 292A that deals child's seduction, 292B regarding the creation, possession, or distribution of child pornography, section 354 deals a person who assaults or uses criminal force against a woman intending to outrage her modesty, section 365 deals abduction or kidnapping someone with the intention of keeping them confined without proper cause or legal justification etc.

Similarly, schedule-II has listed 19 kinds of offences against women and children in addition to those registered under anti-terrorism act.

The report reveals that out of total 22,663 cases listed in Schedule-I, not a single accused could get punishment from the courts in the crimes registered in 30 districts, including Lahore.

Most suspects nominated by the victims in FIRs of these districts escaped punishments as the official data shows only 555 suspects were convicted by the courts in 8,083 cases lodged in eight other districts of Punjab.

The Multan police were at the top among others where 409 suspects out of the total 2,150 were convicted from the courts, according to the report.

As per the Schedule-II offences, no suspect nominated in 22,521 registered crimes against women and children in 33 districts of Punjab was convicted by the courts.

However, only 351 suspects nominated in 5,443 cases lodged in the rest of six districts listed in schedule-II could get punishments.

As per the report, the Lahore police's performance remained most pathetic despite having large-scale resources, manpower and the chain of command of highly experienced officers.

The report reveals the provincial capital police registered 10,141 cases of violent crime against women and children in 2024.

Of them, 65 suspects were acquitted while no one was awarded punishment so far.

Similarly, the report mentioned many other districts which failed in awarding punishments.

They included Rawalpindi, Nankana Sahib, Narowal, Wazirabad, Gujrat, Hafizabad, Mandi Bahauddin, Attock, Jehlum, Chakwal, Murree, Sargodha, Khushab, Bhakkar, Jhang, Chinot, Lodhran, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, Okara, DG Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, and Rahim Yar Khan.

A majority of the cases were shown as 'still under trial' in the report.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 10, 2025

Pakistanis topped asylum seekers' list in UK in 2024

LONDON: In 2024, the largest group of asylum seekers hailed from Pakistan, followed by Afghanistan. In previous years, they came mainly from Syria and Iran.

Britain's Labour government pledged to cut a backlog in asylum applications and end "the costly use of hotels to house asylum seekers", saving £1 billion annually, finance minister Rachel Reeves announced.

"Funding that I have provided today... will cut the asylum backlog, hear more appeal cases and return people who have no rights to be here, saving the taxpayer a billion pounds a year," Reeves said in her Spending Review that sets out Treasury expenditure and savings over the next few years.

The number of UK asylum seekers has risen sharply in recent years, with tens of thousands of applications waiting to be decided, according to official figures.

Labour, which came to power last July, has set about tackling the situation.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has started formal talks with unspecified countries to create "return centres" outside the UK for those who have exhausted all legal avenues to remain in the country.

The number of asylum seekers in the UK tripled to 84,200 in 2024 from an average of 27,500 between 2011 and 2020.

In 2022, there were approximately 13 asylum applications per 10,000 people in the UK, compared with 25 asylum applications per 10,000 people in the EU at the same time.

Some 11 percent of migrants in the UK were asylum seekers or refugees in 2023 — almost twice as high as the 2019 figure of six percent.

The number of people crossing the Channel in makeshift boats, a route that virtually did not exist before 2018, has meanwhile increased sharply in recent years.

Source: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 12, 2025

Revisiting the NSP

ZAFAR MIRZA

"Policies are developed so that we don't become hostage of events." — Anonymous

PAKISTAN's first and comprehensive National Security Policy has assumed marked importance in the wake of skirmishes between India and Pakistan between May 6-10. I referred to the NSP in my last column, 'Development challenges', published in these pages on May 30, 2025. After receiving numerous inquiries, I realised that our NSP may not be general knowledge. So I figured a column was in order. First, let's recognise that we do, in fact, have a valid National Security Policy 2022-2026, and a very good one at that. Most countries either don't have a national security policy or don't make it public. Not only does Pakistan have a national security policy but it is also a largely public document, with a confidential portion.

By contrast in India, as reported by the media there in 2023, the National Security Council Secretariat has been trying to bring out a national security strategy for many years. Deliberations between the military and strategic community have attempted to build a case and content for the strategy, but it has yet to come to fruition.

After Pakistan, Japan has also produced a national security policy with some interesting similarities between the two. Our NSP was approved after thorough discussions by the highest security forum in the country — the National Security Committee (NSC), and then by the highest national government decision-making body, the federal cabinet, on Dec 28, 2021. It was launched publicly on Jan 14, 2022, with full civil and military support. Good public policies are those which are backed up by robust research and wider, inclusive consultative processes, as is the case with the NSP. It was led by our first civilian National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf, who was well-suited to his post because of his laudable credentials. A security and strategy academic, he has credible standing in the global security research community, with his wide-ranging experience and academic contributions.

"Formulating a comprehensive National Security Policy for the approval of the National Security Committee as well as ensuring its sustainability through monitoring its implementation and undertaking periodical reviews/updates in consultation with all stakeholders as required" reads the mandate of the National Security Division, according to the Rules of Business, 1973. However, the division had not fulfilled this important part of its mandate since 1973. There was some active interest in 2014, but even then a national security policy could not be developed.

Upon assuming office in December 2019, Dr Yusuf picked up the mantle. Wider national consultations were undertaken, some of which I witnessed personally; 120 working groups in almost all sectors were set up and more than 500 experts consulted.

The policy passed through civil-military scrutiny. The process eventually involved tabling the document in an in-camera briefing before the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, with the then opposition members unfortunately boycotting the proceedings. Eventually, it was approved by the NSC and the federal cabinet. Rolling out the NSP was meant to set a "directional tone" and send a message to the world that our vision for national security is broad and seeks to identify the means of expanding economic resources so that Pakistan can simultaneously strengthen its traditional and non-traditional security. "The security of Pakistan rests in the security of its citizens," wrote the prime minister in his message. "Realising the symbiotic relationship between economic, human and traditional security is now imperative for Pakistan's long-term development. Domestic stability and reg-ional peace based on mutual coexistence, regional connectivity, and shared prosperity are essential prerequisites to optimising national security."

The NSP articulates a citizen-centric comprehensive national security framework for Pakistan whose ultimate purpose is to ensure the safety, security, dignity and prosperity of Pakistanis.

Organised in eight parts, the NSP covers almost all important aspects of a comprehensive national security framework: national cohesion; economic future; defence and territorial integrity; internal security; foreign policy in a changing world; and human security. The last section on human security covers population growth and migration; health security; climate and water stress; food security and gender security. The NSP includes education in the section on "securing our economic future" as a means of producing an employable and skilled labour force in a highly competitive and technology-driven global job market. Personally, I am not too happy with the section on health security as it is patchy in concept. It is mainly driven by the Covid pandemic and how to prepare and respond to health emergencies rather than paying serious attention to the urgent need to strengthen essential healthcare for all without discrimination, ie, universal health coverage, which is not possible without investing in primary healthcare.

The continuity of public policies across governments is a sign of system maturity. However, implementation is another challenge altogether.

Regarding the continuity of the NSP, despite providing an inbuilt annual review within the policy, we haven't heard anything about its implementation. Even in the case of the best laws and policies, the devil resides in the space between policy and implementation.

At the moment, it seems that our NSP has been forgotten. In the backdrop of the events of last month, and with Pakistan now sending its delegations to other capitals to present its case, I wonder if the NSP was even a part of the dossiers prepared for members of the delegation.

It is never too late, however. It is time to revisit Pakistan's National Security Policy, update it, and implement it. This would be our best case on national security to put before the world.

The writer is a former health minister and currently a professor of health systems & population health at the Shifa Tameer-i-Millat University.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 13, 2025

Deradicalisation

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

IN a country where political and religious leaders often fall victim to extremism, there is a dire need to understand the linkages between the health of a democracy and the level of radicalisation in society. Democracy relies on the inclusion of all in the political process, which requires individuals to engage in dialogue and find peaceful means of addressing grievances. Therefore, we must ask: how can tolerance be promoted? Is it possible without freedom of speech, the rule of law, access to justice, and respect for fundamental human rights?

For democratic societies, it is imperative for the state to ensure a balance between individual freedoms and collective security. Radicalisation usually stems from alienation, disenfranchisement or frustration with political processes, while deradicalisation refers to the process of dissuading individuals from extreme ideologies and reintegrating them into society. However, the relationship between deradicalisation efforts and democracy is a complex phenomenon shaped by various sociopolitical and cultural factors.

In most postcolonial societies, the criminal justice system tends to favour punitive measures rather than rehabilitation, whereas mature democracies lean towards rehabilitation over retribution. The latter requires changes in the legal framework, police training and community engagement instead of simply imprisoning or isolating individuals. It also involves providing psychological support, education and facilitating community reintegration.

Extremists typically reject democratic principles and undermine the core tenets of democratic governance. Democracy upholds civil liberties, while extremists aim to limit them. However, repressive measures can undermine democratic values, thereby pushing individuals towards radical ideologies. It is important to remember that deradicalisation is not possible without freedom of thought, equality and human dignity.

Deradicalisation efforts must not only address individual beliefs but also the structural grievances that fuel radicalism. Encouraging civic engagement, nurturing critical thinking, promoting tolerance, and making these part of educational policies can help counter extremist ideologies. Imparting the principles of democracy and the value of human rights should also be part of civic education. The promotion of interfaith and intercultural dialogue can facilitate discussions between people with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, resulting in more tolerance, reduced fear and misunderstanding, and denouncement of radical views.

Community-based approaches are considered effective for deradicalisation, as local communities are generally the first to detect signs of radicalisation in their surroundings. Engaging local community leaders in deradicalisation initiatives can create supportive networks that result in peaceful conflict resolution and prevent violence.

In conservative societies, such initiatives can be confronted with controversies. Measuring their effectiveness is difficult as sometimes there are no clear metrics to track. Since follow-up periods are short, there are chances of individuals re-offending. External interference is also a potent trigger for radicalisation: when foreign donors and NGOs work on deradicalisation, such measures can be looked upon with suspicion, thus eroding their credibility. Deradicalisation programmes may also unintentionally promote a particular ideology or politically biased narrative, thus marginalising alternative perspectives. Therefore, ensuring ideological neutrality is essential.

Deradicalisation often requires surveillance and intelligence gathering on individuals, which generates de--b-ate about privacy and discrimination, parti-cularly when such initiatives are targeted at individuals belonging to a specific ethnicity or religion. Effective deradicalisation efforts need to ensure a balance between security needs and the protection of civil liberties. Some programmes operate in prisons, raising ethical questions about consent. Since participants in such initiatives are monitored, these may violate privacy and result in mistrust.

Pakistan's National Action Plan was primarily based on kinetic measures; however, the revised NAP has been divided into kinetic and non-kinetic measures, of which nine points relate to the latter.

Achieving a balance between security, rehabilitation, and civil liberties remains a challenge, but when implemented effectively, deradicalisation can help strengthen our democracy by promoting inclusivity, dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution.

The real challenge lies in finding a balance between countering extremism and safeguarding individual freedoms. Achieving such a balance is possible.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 14, 2025

Drilling Down to Simplicity

ANS KHURRAM

The other day, as one often does, , I was killing time by scrolling through social media content when I was stopped in my tracks by a post that really resonated with me. "We tend to focus on the business of analytics, when in fact we should be focusing on the analytics of a business." As someone who has seen firsthand how companies can get caught up in the latest analytics tools, dashboards and complex models – often at the expense of real business impact – I dwelled on this statement for a few days.

It is estimated that humans generate 2.5 quintillion bytes of data every day: that is 18 zeroes or a billion multiplied by another billion. In this landscape, businesses are inundated with analytics-based solutions promising transformative insights. As a result, the 'business of analytics' puts the focus on the mechanics – choosing the right software, fine-tuning machine learning models and debating methodologies – rather than on using analytics as a tool to drive tangible business outcomes.

The hype around the 'analytics of business' is real and amped up by studies like a PWC survey of 1,000 executives claiming that "data-driven organisations are three times more likely to report significant improvements in decision-making compared to other firms that leverage data less." However, the sheer volume and complexity of data often leads to analysis paralysis, which hinders effective decision-making. In my experience, when it comes to marketing and behavioural analytics, executives often prefer straightforward, actionable insights that directly inform strategic decisions. I practice K.I.S.S. – or 'Keep it Simple Stupid.' At the end of the day, the best way to convey a message is with a simple percentage, ideally in a manner where everything adds up to 100%. Or if you want to generate extra oomph, throw in that 'X times' variable to really send across that message. The reality is that simplification makes any number accessible to audiences, helping them to grasp the scale of an issue much better. Percentages are also easier to use in explaining a behaviour, as opposed to an index score that morphs multiple variables into one number or a data science model that spits out a probability.

Whenever I have worked on studies like the 'Brand Health Tracker' with marketing and strategy teams, my observation is that it is far easier to use basic percentages, such as 'awareness' or 'consideration' as opposed to a 'brand equity score' (an index score), which is trickier for the majority of the stakeholders to comprehend. Index scores may be useful for some advanced statistical analysis, but in the end, those outputs are also used to support a narrative that is built on simple KPIs. Ultimately, it is important to recognise that effective data analysis does not necessarily equate to complexity. Human behaviours are complex and understanding what drives them is a messy proposition. The most complexity that I add to my analysis is to combine two simple KPIs to model customer behaviours. One of the complexities that I add to my analysis is by

using answers derived from market research sessions during which we pose questions about the brand (for instance, about its negative attributes) to people who were either using a particular brand or had used it in the past (churned customers) to arrive at the reasons why people stopped using the brand. Similarly, you can create different levels of digital 'engagement' in your customer base by looking into how many channels a customer uses (email, website, app etc.) and by adding their recently used channels (last month, last year, etc.). This can potentially allow one to form hypotheses about why customers may be churning, which can then be tested using available data sources.

This said, it is also extremely important to understand the limitations of simplicity. The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a widely used instrument in boardrooms across the world to measure loyalty. It is also straightforward and easy to measure by using a 0-10 scale. Many companies often use NPS scores to evaluate employee compensation or bonuses. However, the founder of NPS has categorically recommended that NPS scores be delinked from employee bonuses because "only bad things will happen"; in other words, employees start caring less about pleasing customers and more about getting a high rating.

Don't get me wrong; simplicity does not mean that data science models are not effective. The main issue with data science is usually a lack of understanding about the data that is input into models. Understanding exactly how the data is being sourced leads one to an understanding of exactly how a business functions – and it is this business context that then acts as the foundation that summarises the outputs of the models, leading to simplification for stakeholders. This is critical from a marketing or behavioural perspective, as these data variables are much more subjective and vague as opposed to variables in operations (like inventory) for instance.

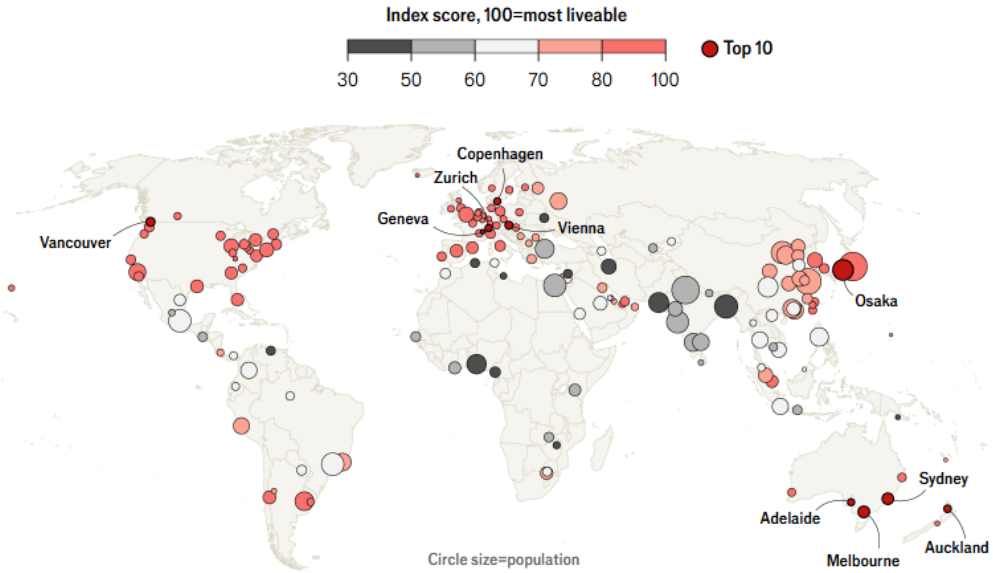
Analysts should take time out to talk to the customer or, at the very least, to the customer-facing operatives. Similarly, they should interact with peers and be up-to-date with the latest news about their industry. Peers often help put numbers into perspective and help set the context, and more importantly, prioritise insights and recommendations. I usually prepare a one-liner answer to the most common question at the end of a report: "What should we focus on?"

This leads to the final contradiction: simplicity is an illusion you cast for your audience. Drilling down to 'simplicity' often requires an analyst to tackle a lot of data complications in order to distil it into bite-sized portions for stakeholders. It's a painstaking process to go through data and reprocess it from multiple angles, only to discover that there is yet another lens to look at. Processing the data or writing SQL is the easy part – personally, I spend much more time staring at a blank slide/page debating the order in which I present my data points so that it seems coherent and clear.

The aim of focusing on simplicity is to help drown out the noise and help stakeholders hone in on the next steps. Simplicity also allows one to scale work more easily and make it quicker to reproduce if necessary. At the same time, simplicity also demands an understanding of what the data means, how it was sourced and calculated and where any blind spots may be. So yes, simplicity does require going down the rabbit hole without entering Wonderland.

Source: DAWN, 2 MAY, 2025

Karachi once again ranks among least liveable cities in global survey



Karachi ranked among the world's least liveable cities in 2025, according to a global survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit. — The Economist

Karachi once again ranked in the bottom five of the world's "least liveable cities" in a global survey by The Economist.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the metropolis ranked 170 on a list of 173 countries — just above Dhaka, Tripoli and Damascus — and had a score of 42.7 on the index score, with a score of 100 being "most liveable".

It was the only Pakistani city to feature on the list, albeit poorly.

Most liveable			Least liveable		
1	Copenhagen	98.0	164	Caracas	44.9
2=	Vienna	97.1	165	Kyiv	44.5
2=	Zurich	97.1	166	Port Moresby	44.1
4	Melbourne	97.0	167	Harare	43.8
5	Geneva	96.8	168	Lagos	43.5
6	Sydney	96.6	169	Algiers	42.8
7=	Osaka	96.0	170	Karachi	42.7
7=	Auckland	96.0	171	Dhaka	41.7
9	Adelaide	95.9	172	Tripoli	40.1
10	Vancouver	95.8	173	Damascus	30.7

Sources: EIU; UN Population Division

Topping the list was Copenhagen, with a score of 98. Vienna and Zurich tied for second place at 97.1, followed by Melbourne at 97.0, and Geneva with a score of 96.8.

The annual survey, designed to help companies calculate hardship allowances when they relocate staff, rates 173 cities across five categories: health care, culture and environment, education, infrastructure and stability, according to The Economist.

In last year's ranking, Karachi compared with Lagos, Tripoli, Algiers and Damascus. The year before, Karachi was ranked 169 out of 173 countries

Last October, the Asian Deve-lopment Bank said the livability of cities in Pakistan is decreasing, and urban centres in the country are becoming increasingly inefficient, scoring low on multiple competitiveness indexes, with congestion, unattractiveness and pollution.

The ADB report assessed that class division was a major problem in Karachi since most of the elite live in cantonment areas or private housing societies, while those on low incomes have been pushed to the city's largest district, Karachi East.

The city is further divided along religious and ethnic lines, which has led to several outbreaks of violence in the past. Karachi is the only city in Pakistan that, to some degree, is expanding vertically due to limited land and urgent housing needs, the report said.

In July, Karachi was ranked as the second riskiest city for tourists with a rating of 93.12 out of 100 according to a Forbes Adviser list.

Per the ranking, Karachi had the highest personal security risk, reflecting risk from crime, violence, terrorist threats, natural disasters, and economic vulnerabilities.

The list said Karachi had the second-worst (level 3, reconsider travel) travel safety rating from the US State Department. It further said that the metropolis had the fourth-highest infrastructure security risk, reflecting the availability and quality of city infrastructure.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 17, 2025

Spread of hate

HATE speech is not confined to words; in fact, there is a causal link between hateful rhetoric and real-world violence. That is why today, as we observe the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, states worldwide must re-examine their efforts to counter violent and hateful speech both online and in the real world. This year's theme is 'Hate speech and artificial intelligence'. As the UN chief notes, "biased algorithms and digital platforms are spreading toxic content and creating new spaces for harassment and abuse". In Pakistan, we have witnessed the deadly consequences of ignoring hate speech, as extremist groups have used online platforms — along with more traditional methods — to mobilise against certain communities.

Sometimes hatemongers have provoked members of the majority community to prevent minority groups from observing their religious rites. In other, more violent episodes, there have been organised attacks on various confessional groups on flimsy, often fabricated grounds. In all these instances, hate speech has amplified matters. Therefore, while the state has banned extremist groups, there must also be stringent punishment for individuals or outfits that spread venom and endanger lives.

The fact is that hate speech is a worldwide problem. For example, in India, even elected officials have been witnessed using vile, inflammatory language against Indian Muslims. It appears that members of the Sangh Parivar can get away with murder, as the BJP-led government is not interested in clamping down on anti-Muslim hate. Even in the supposed democracies of the West, Islamophobia has become a major concern. Figures collected by the UK advocacy group Tell Mama reveal that Islamophobic incidents were at a record high in 2024.

Numbers from the US, released by CAIR, a Muslim community organisation, tell a similar story. The incidents range from abusive behaviour to actual physical assaults. It is also true that in many societies, the far right is treating Muslims as well as people of colour and immigrants as bogeymen responsible for society's ills. Recent riots in Northern Ireland were apparently racially motivated.

All states need to take a firmer line against hate groups, and the targeting of individuals based on their religion or ethnicity. The world seems to be drowning in a cesspool of hatred, and governments must adopt a zero-tolerance approach against individuals or groups that promote violence and the exclusion of others. Cracking down on hate speech, whether in the virtual realm or the real world, is the first step.

In this regard, Big Tech must also be held to account, as social media platforms often turn into breeding grounds for abhorrent, hateful rhetoric, with little to no moderation. These platforms cannot be allowed to ignore their responsibilities, especially when their negligence is putting lives at risk.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 18, 2025

Stable coins gain ground with corporates as US legislation takes shape

LONDON: Stablecoins — a form of cryptocurrency backed by traditional assets — are gaining traction, with the US Senate bill is on track to regulate such digital tokens. But as stablecoins move closer to the financial mainstream, experts warn that weak regulation could leave investors and the financial system vulnerable.

What are stablecoins?

Stablecoins play a key role in crypto markets, enabling users to trade digital assets without relying on traditional banks, instead using a decentralised register known as blockchain. Unlike volatile cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, stablecoins track the value of traditional assets — such as the US dollar or gold — enabling greater stability.

Tether and USDC, for example, are pegged to the dollar, backed by reserves held by their issuing companies. They are useful internationally because they enable "fast, low-cost cross-border payments", Dessislava Aubert, analyst at crypto insights firm Kaiko, said.

This is "especially valuable in emerging markets where access to hard currency and traditional banking services is often limited", Aubert added. Examples include Argentina, Nigeria and Turkiye. The market value of stablecoins soared to $246 billion in May, up from $20 billion in 2020, according to Deutsche Bank.

And the total number of transactions in 2024 surpassed those of Visa and Mastercard.

USDC's issuer, Circle, made a splash this month when it was listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Why is the US regulating them?

To ensure the stability of stablecoins, the United States is pushing for issuers to hold sufficient low-risk, liquid assets — such as dollars and Treasury bills. This could also boost demand for US debt and the greenback.

The proposed legislation would require major stablecoin issuers to undergo regular audits and make it tougher to launch new tokens. These safeguards became more urgent after the collapse of the Terra stablecoin in 2022, which showed how these tokens can "depeg", or lose the link to the asset they are meant to track.

There's a risk that an organisation may not be trustworthy or could be hacked, making audits and checks vital, explained Murat Kantarcioglu, a computer science professor at Virginia Tech University in the United States.

Another possibility is that a loss of trust in the stablecoin may ripple beyond the crypto world, hitting the assets that back these tokens.

Does the bill go far enough?

"The new rules could make it harder for start-ups to issue stablecoins, creating a risk that a few big com-panies — such as tech giants — could dominate the market," Aubert said.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Amazon and Walmart are considering issuing their own stablecoin, which their customers could use for purchases. Democrats opposing the bill say risks of speculation, money laundering and political conflicts of interest associated with stablecoins are not sufficiently addressed.

Notably, President Donald Trump's family has helped launch a stablecoin called USD1, used by Emirati fund MGX. And even with new regulations, in the event of issuer bankruptcy, stablecoin losses "are not explicitly covered by government insurance programs", unlike "bank deposits, which are insured up to $250,000", Aubert pointed out.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 18, 2025

Police seize record 404kg ice in last five months

LAHORE: Police claimed to have recovered 404kg ice (crystal methamphetamine) in the first five months of this year, far surpassing the total recoveries of the past two years -- 61.9kg in 2023 and 175kg in 2024.

The figures have alarmed the law-enforcement agencies as they fear that if parents keep on leaving the young generation exposed to the highly addictive and dangerous drug (ice), the situation may get from bad to worse in near future.

Quoting some health experts, the police officials say the meth abuse leads to anxiety, insomnia, and violent behaviour, making the youngsters indulge in crime and other violations.

They say the trend of rash driving, physical assaults, suicide attempts and other serious activities is increasing in the lives of the youngsters, including students, due to the use of the ice in normal get-togethers and in educational institutions.

According to an analysis carried out by the Lahore police high-ups, youngsters are introduced to the crystal meth in such gatherings and this practice goes largely unchecked or overlooked by the parents.

According to a study, the police say, the international price for meth ranges from $7,000 to $15,000 per kilogram that showed the drug is largely used by the rich class.

However, ice is not the only drug seeing a dramatic increase in recovery as the business of some other dangerous drugs is also on the rise in Lahore.

A broader look at narcotics reveals that recovery of heroin jumped from 168 kg in 2023 and 285 kg in 2024 to 243 kg in the first five months of 2025.

Similarly, the data shows the opium confiscated by police rose from 125 kg in 2023 and 436 in 2024 to 232 kg in five months of this year. As drug seizures have soared, the number of drug cases and the arrests made by the Lahore police focused on key suppliers and traffickers.

Lahore Operations DIG Faisal Kamran attributed the actions to a "shift from routine enforcement to intelligent, tech-driven strategy."

This includes real-time surveillance using modern technology, enhanced coordination among law-enforcement agencies, use of artificial intelligence to identify drug trafficking hotspots, strengthening of community intelligence and informant networks, he said.

Mr Kamran said the shift in operational style has not only improved efficiency but also aligns closely with the orders of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz who wants zero tolerance towards sale of the drugs, particularly ice, in the provincial capital.

The CM had ordered eradication of the drug networks from Lahore by taking firm actions against the emerging threats to the health and lives of the young generations, he said adding that the provincial government also recently imposed a comprehensive ban on e-cigarettes and vapes, citing their harmful effects and growing use among teenagers and young adults.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 18, 2025

Pakistanis among 60 migrants feared dead after two shipwrecks: IOM

TRIPOLI/BERLIN: At least 60 migrants are feared dead after a pair of shipwrecks off the coast of Libya, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The first ship went down on June 12 near a Libyan port in Tripoli, with 21 people, including women and children, reported missing and only five survivors found, the IOM said in a statement.

Those lost at sea included Eritrean, Pakistani, Egyptian and Sudanese nationals. The second wreck took place about 35 kilometres off the port city of Tobruk, with the sole survivor reporting 39 people lost at sea, according to the UN body.

"With dozens feared dead and entire families left in anguish, IOM is once again urging the international community to scale up search and rescue operations and guarantee safe, predictable disembarkation for survivors," said Othman Belbeisi, the IOM's regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

According to the statement, at least 743 people have died so far this year trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. The deadly route, it said, is "marked by increasingly dangerous smuggling practices, limited rescue capacity and growing restrictions on humanitarian operations".

As of June 15, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, migrant landings on the Italian coast were up 15 per cent year on year, with most originating in Libya.

Maritime rescue organisations said on Wednesday they had pulled more than 175,000 people from the Mediterranean over the past 10 years, as waves of migrants sought to use the dangerous sea route to reach Europe. The group of 21 NGOS active in the region estimated that at least 28,932 people had died while trying to cross the sea since 2015.

The majority had died in the central Mediterranean — waters between Libya, Tunisia, Italy and Malta — Mirka Schaefer of German NGO SOS Humanity told a Berlin press conference. In that area, the equivalent of five adults and one child lost their lives every day over the past decade, she said. The number of unrecorded cases was likely to be "significantly higher", she added.

Of the 21 organisations currently engaged in maritime rescue in the region, 10 of them are based in Germany. Between them, the groups operate 15 boats, four sail ships and four planes. The organisations have frequently clashed with authorities over their rescue operations, which were launched as Europe's migration crisis broke out in 2015, when hundreds of thousands headed to the continent, mostly from the Middle East.

In Italy, the current government has vowed to end crossings and attacked NGOs for creating a "pull factor" that encourages departures, something migration observers say is unproven. Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government has passed laws requiring rescue ships to return to a designated port, a measure NGOs say is contrary to maritime law.

"The pressure on us is growing," Schaefer said, criticising a lack of support from the German government.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 19, 2025

Six security men martyred in attacks across Balochistan, KP

- **Six terrorists killed in police operations**
- **Bodies of four men, including two soldiers, found in Mardan**

PESHAWAR / QUETTA: Six security personnel were martyred and as many terrorists gunned down in attacks and operations across Khyber Pakht-unkhwa and Balochistan, officials confirmed.

Meanwhile, the bodies of four men, including two army personnel, were found in Mardan.

In Swabi, two police personnel were martyred on Friday midnight when unidentified motorcyclists opened fire, according to Swabi District Police Officer Azhar Khan.

The martyred policemen were on duty in the Gadoon Amazai Industrial Estate police station and had stopped to drink water at a hotel when two assailants on motorcycles opened fire.

Videos shared on social media showed the cops, Zahid Khan and Jamaluddin from Gadoon Amazai region, sitting on chairs when the attackers opened fire.

Their funerals were held at Shahmansoor Police Lines.

Mardan Regional Police Officer Najeebur Rehman, DPO Khan, SP Investigation Iftikhar Ali Khan, DSPs, SHOs, Swabi deputy commissioner and victims' families attended the funeral.

The RPO and DPO paid tribute to the martyred cops and said they stood with the bereaved families in this hour of grief.

Police launched a search operation in the area to arrest the attackers. No arrests have been made yet.

Bodies found

Police have recovered four bodies in the mountainous Babuzai area of Katlang tehsil of Mardan.

A preliminary investigation conducted by the police and Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) revealed the four men were "killed by militants led by Commander Abdul Hameed Hamasi".

According to the police, locals spotted the bodies and informed the police, who arrived at the scene and moved the bodies to a hospital.

One of the victims was identified as Hammad Ghafoor, son of Raham Ghafoor, a resident of Babuzai and owner of a crushing plant.

According to sources, he was abducted by unknown persons four days ago.

The second victim was identified as Zubair Afridi, son of Fazal Akbar and a resident of Bara. He was the head of Aman Lashkar.

The other two victims were in the army. Their names have been withheld as official confirmation is awaited.

According to police, the victims were killed two to three days ago.

The funeral of Mr Ghafoor was held in his native village, while the funeral prayers of the other victims were held in Nowshera.

According to the district police spokesperson, a search operation has been launched and a case was registered with the CTD.

Six alleged terrorists have been nominated in the FIR, including Qasim, Usman, Umar Sadiq, Zahid Khan, Muhammad Umar Khan and Mudasir.

'Terrorist commander' killed

In D.I. Khan, an alleged terrorist commander, affiliated with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan Gandapur faction, was killed by police.

According to the local police spokesman, Yaqub Zulqarnain, the exchange of fire took place when terrorists ambushed a police team returning from Takwara.

The cops repulsed the attack and managed to gun down the terrorist commander, who was later identified as Fatah.

District Police Officer Sajjad Ahmad Sahibzada and Sadar SP later led a search operation to apprehend the remaining suspects.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IG Zulfiqar Hameed lauded the D.I. Khan police for their action. He also announced commendations and rewards for the personnel.

Balochistan clashes

In Balochistan, four security personnel, including a senior CTD officer, were martyred in attacks and operations against terrorists.

In a bomb attack in Mongochar area of Kalat, two personnel of the Frontier Corps were martyred and four were injured.

Officials said a bomb disposal team was sweeping the area near Sheikh Haji post to clear landmines when an improvised explosive device, planted in the area, was remotely detonated, a senior official confirmed.

In a separate attack in Kalat, a CTD officer was gunned down by unknown armed men.

The victim, identified as Sub-Inspector Fida Ahmed, was targeted near his home.

In another firing incident in Mastung, unknown armed men gunned down two persons, including a police official.

The victims were identified as Shakeel Ahmed Bangulzai and Adnan Ahmed Dehwar.

Levies station attacked

Officials said a group of armed men attacked a Levies station in Kirdgab area of Mastung late on Saturday night.

The attackers managed to overcome the Levies' personnel after a heavy exchange of fire.

The armed men damaged official vehicles and looted weapons before escaping towards nearby mountains.

Unknown armed men also attacked the house of the Khuzdar district council chairman Salahuddin Zehri late on Friday night.

They hurled hand grenades at the house, damaging its walls.

Mr Zehri, who belonged to PPP, was not at home at the time of the attack. No casualties have been reported.

A roadside bomb blast also took place in Gandawah, Jhal Magsi on Saturday. No casualties were reported in the attack.

Meanwhile, a CTD spokesman confirmed five terrorists belonging to a banned outfit were killed in Qila Abdullah on Saturday.

The CTD, after receiving intelligence reports about the presence of wanted terrorists, launched an operation in the Jungle Piralizai area, the spokesman said.

After a heavy gun battle, five terrorists were killed. The spokesperson claimed arms, ammunition and maps of sensitive installations were recovered from the terrorists' hideout.

The terrorists were allegedly involved in attacks on security forces.

Muhammad Jamal Hoti in Mardan, Ali Jan Magsi in Nasirabad, Abdul Wahid Shahwani in Khuzdar and Saleem Shahid also contributed to this report

Source: DAWN, JUNE 22, 2025

Violence against children hit 'unprecedented levels': UN

FROM Gaza to the Democratic Republic of Congo, violence against children in conflict zones reached "unprecedented levels" in 2024, a United Nations annual report has said.

"In 2024, violence against children in armed conflict reached unprecedented levels, with a staggering 25 percent surge in the number of grave violations in comparison with 2023," according to the report from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The report verified 41,370 grave violations against children in 2024 — including 36,221 committed in 2024 and 5,149 committed previously but confirmed in 2024 — the highest number since the monitoring tool was established nearly 30 years ago.

The new high beats 2023, another record year, which itself represented a 21pc increase over the preceding year. With more than 4,500 killed and 7,000 injured, children continue to bear "the brunt of relentless hostilities and indiscriminate attacks," the report said.

There was also a marked increase in the number of child victims of multiple violations to 22,495.

"The cries of 22,495 innocent children who should be learning to read or play ball — but instead have been forced to learn how to survive gunfire and bombings — should keep all of us awake at night," said Virginia Gamba, special representative of the UN secretary general for children and armed conflict.

"This must serve as a wake-up call. We are at the point of no return." In its annual report, the UN compiles violations of the rights of children, those aged under 18, in some 20 conflict zones around the world.

In its appendix, a "list of shame" calls out those responsible for these violations — a powerful coalition of Haitian gangs was added this year — which include child killings and mutilations, recruitment to violence, kidnappings, denial of humanitarian aid and sexual violence.

List of shame

The Palestinian territories occupy the top spot in the dismal rankings, with more than 8,500 serious violations, the vast majority attributed to Israeli forces, including more than 4,800 in the Gaza Strip.

This figure includes confirmation of 1,259 Palestinian children killed in Gaza, and the UN notes it is currently verifying information on an additional 4,470 children killed in 2024 in the war-torn territory.

The report also calls out Israel's military operations in Lebanon, where more than 500 children were killed or injured last year. Following the Palestinian territories, the countries where the UN

recorded the most violence against children in 2024 are: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (more than 4,000 grave violations), Somalia (more than 2,500), Nigeria (nearly 2,500), and Haiti (more than 2,200).

"List of shame" inductees include Haitian gang coalition "Viv Ansanm," blamed for a 490pc increase in violations, including child recruitment, murders and gang rapes. Another addition to the list is Colombian drug cartel Clan del Golfo, which is accused of child recruitment.

Colombia in general recorded a significant increase in cases of forced recruitment, with 450 children in 2024 compared to 262 the previous year. Remaining on the list are the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which have been fighting in Sudan for more than two years.

Also listed again is the Russian army for its actions in Ukraine, where the report records a 105pc increase in serious violations between 2023 and 2024. —INQUIRER.net (The Philippines)

Source: DAWN, JUNE 23, 2025

What if the UN Charter fails? A world without rules is closer than we think

Palestinians queue in front of a hot meal distribution kitchen in Rafah on Sunday.

RIGHT now, something very dangerous is unfolding, not just in Gaza or Sudan, but in our international system. We are witnessing the slow unravelling of a promise made nearly 80 years ago — "that no country should again have unchecked power to dominate, destroy, or displace".

That promise was enshrined in the United Nations Charter in 1945, which came out of the horrors of two world wars and the atrocities of the Holocaust. Countries around the world came together, not only in hope, but in fear of what humanity could do when left without rules.

The Charter's mission was simple, but profound: To prevent war, protect countries and their people and promote peace, justice and human rights. Today, that mission is being gate-crashed by powerful countries with weapons and agendas and we have to reflect on this as the same kind of bystander behavior that existed during the Holocaust. Silence then cost millions of lives. We are seeing the same lives lost today.

The Charter that built a fragile peace

In 1945, 50 nations gathered in San Francisco to create a framework for peace. Leaders like US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill had seen firsthand what silence and complicity could do – the wreckage of world war, genocide and aggression left unchecked.

The UN Charter was clear — no country could use force to seize another. Every person had the right to safety and self-determination, not occupation, not oppression. It laid the foundation for a world where diplomacy, not tanks and bombs, should be the first response — a world where national budgets favored cooperation and understanding over militarisation, but that framework is now cracking.

A world without accountability

When international law is violated; when innocent people are bombed; land is occupied; UN resolutions are ignored — and no consequences follow — what is left to stop others from doing the same? Today, we are witnessing the collapse of accountability. Israel continues its military operations in Gaza, despite international condemnation and warnings from the International Court of Justice. The US and its allies fund and arm conflicts across the world and China is right to ask why some countries seem to operate outside the Charter altogether, while others are held to it. This is not just about one country. It is about a principle – that no-one is above the law; because if some are, then no-one is safe.

What if the UN didn't exist?

Imagine a world without a UN Charter. No agreed rules. No accountability. No Geneva Conventions. No international courts. No peacekeepers. Just power, money and force; an international version of Lord of the Flies. Some might say we're already close to that now or we are living it. The UN Charter still exists on paper, but its enforcement depends on the political determination of its most powerful members. Too often, those members have vested interests in the very wars they are meant to help end. What we're left with is an institution full of values, but robbed of its teeth. Full of speeches, but lacking enforcement.

What if we spent on peace like we do on war?

Here's a confronting reality — the — S is now urging its allies to spend up to 3.5 percent of GDP on weapons. Billions are poured into defence contracts, surveillance, drones and nuclear arsenals, but what if we invested even half that in peace, diplomacy, education, reconciliation, climate action and justice? What if we gave mediators the airtime we give to generals? What if ceasefire talks were funded like war rooms? What if we sent food, not fighter jets, to vulnerable communities?

Peace is never passive. It takes planning, people and funding, just like war does, but right now the scales are tipped toward destruction… and it's people and our planet who pay the price. Could peace be our most powerful defense?

The choice ahead

We must ask — what kind of world are we leaving behind? A world where the strong crush the weak with no consequences? Where the cries of families buried under rubble are drowned out by greed, power, and control?

Source: DAWN, JUNE 23, 2025

The dangers of rushing crypto adoption

AREEBA KHAN

In April 2025, Pakistan announced the launch of a new Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC) and named Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao as its strategic adviser. Finance Minister Aurangzeb hailed it as "a landmark moment" for Pakistan, saying the country was 'open for innovation'. Mr Zhao himself spoke of the 'limitless' potential of a nation where 60 per cent of people are under 30.

Yet beneath the optimism lies a critical question: is Pakistan embracing crypto too quickly without the institutional safeguards needed to manage its risks?

Pakistan's financial oversight landscape is fragile. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in 2018 warned that digital currencies, due to their decentralised nature, could become conduits for money laundering and illicit finance. That concern remains.

Although PCC is framed as a modernisation effort, declared as a movement to turn Pakistan into a Web3 'powerhouse', the council's ambition warrants caution, especially given the economic and governance realities of the country. Though out of the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force, Pakistan's anti-money laundering/counter-terrorism financing still has significant blind spots which manifest more with emerging fintech companies.

In one case, the Federal Investigation Agency launched investigations into a major scam where Pakistani investors were defrauded of around $100 million through unauthorised crypto investment apps linked to Binance wallets. Pakistan lacked effective tools to trace crypto wallet owners or hold offshore exchanges accountable, highlighting the weakness of cross-border regulatory cooperation. Despite adopting potential solutions, crypto's inherent design to protect user anonymity complicates tracing even further.

Even when regulated, cryptocurrencies continue to pose multiple financial crime risks. Their pseudonymous transactions make enforcement tricky. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) emphasised that without proper oversight, crypto could lead to widespread tax evasion. Unprepared tax systems could someday mean widespread evasion of value-added tax and sales taxes, leading to materially lower government revenues.

A 2021 report estimated that crypto capital gains taxes might have raised $100billion globally, and in Pakistan, where tax collection is already challenged, lax crypto rules could let affluent holders shelter gains off-book, especially since neither the Virtual Asset Bill, 2025, nor the Income Tax Ordinance, 2002, makes any mention of crypto taxation.

Money laundering is the paramount worry. Global data now suggest illicit crypto flows of tens of billions of dollars yearly. With a crypto transaction volume estimated at $40.9bn in 2024, nearly a quarter was linked to cybercrime.

History offers vivid examples as well: The Tornado Cash saga reveals how decentralised, privacy-enhancing crypto tools can facilitate large-scale money laundering and sanctions evasion. Tornado Cash (a privacy tool) became a hub for laundering funds stolen in cyber attacks, including by North Korean state hackers.

For Pakistan, this shows that in the absence of regulation, without oversight, local or imported crypto tools could be used to wash proceeds from cybercrime, tax evasion, or terrorism financing. Thus, missing a robust regulatory framework, even beneficial crypto innovations (like remittancecutting stablecoins) will introduce significant risks for Pakistan.

For emerging market economies (EMEs), the stakes are even higher. Unlike rich countries with deep capital markets, economies like Pakistan tend to be bank-based, with volatile currencies and lower financial literacy. The Bank of International Settlements (BIS) notes these "particularities make EMEs more vulnerable to some of the cryptorelated financial stability risks than advanced economies".

In practice, widespread crypto adoption could undermine Pakistan's policy tools. BIS and IMF analyses agree that Pakistan's financial system is unusually fragile to crypto shocks; an unguarded crypto sector could amplify capital flight and exchange rate volatility and lead to what the IMF termed as 'cryptoisation'.

More advanced jurisdictions have moved cautiously. Japan has been a crypto regulatory pioneer since the 2014 MtGox crash: it was the first country to impose a comprehensive crypto framework. Japanese law requires all crypto exchanges to register with the financial agency and meet strict standards, and this approach to tackling the risks in crypto bore fruit in 2022 following the failure of FTX. The Japanese subsidiary of FTX was completely protected from the troubles of its global parent.

The United Kingdom is pursuing a similar path. In April 2025 the UK government unveiled a draft law to bring crypto under its Financial Services and Markets Act 2002, covering everything from trading platforms to stablecoin issuance.

Pakistan's stance, launching a crypto council and advisor without first enacting clear rules, especially with the benched Virtual Assets Bill, flips that sequence. It risks giving priority to the allure of modernity over the hard work of enforcement, thereby exposing Pakistan to the very dangers the SBP warned against.

The PCC's next steps will test whether Pakistan can learn from others, especially since it was ranked ninth globally under the crypto adoption index. If the council works with lawmakers to adopt global crypto standards like mandating audits, capital requirements and strong governance, then the country might harness blockchain for innovation.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 23, 2025

Global cocaine market hit new record highs: UNODC

Cocaine production, seizures and use all hit record highs in 2023, the UN drug agency said, with the illicit drug's market the world's fastest-growing.

Illegal production jumped to 3,708 tons, nearly 34 per cent more than in 2022, and more than four times higher than 10 years earlier, when it was at a low, the Vienna-based UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in its annual report.

The current surge is mainly due to an increase in the size of the area under illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia and updated yield data, it added.

Global cocaine seizures, too, recorded a high of 2,275 tons, marking a 68pc rise in the four years to 2023. The number of cocaine users also grew to 25 million in 2023, up from 17 million ten years earlier.

"Cocaine has become fashionable for the more affluent society," UNODC chief researcher Angela Me said, noting a "vicious cycle" of increased use and production.

While Colombia remains the key producer, cocaine traffickers are breaking into new markets across Asia and Africa, according to the report, with organised crime groups from the Western Balkans increasing their influence.

Captagon

"A new era of global instability has intensified challenges in addressing the world drug problem, empowering organised crime groups and pushing drug use to historically high levels," UNODC noted.

In 2023, 6pc of the population aged between 15 and 64 are estimated to have used a drug, compared to 5.2pc of the population in 2013.

Cannabis remains the most widely used drug.

Seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants also reached a record high in 2023, making up almost half of all global seizures of synthetic drugs, followed by synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, UNODC said.

The fall of ruler Bashar al-Assad in Syria last December has "created uncertainty around the future of the captagon trade", UNODC added.

Earlier this month, Syria said authorities had seized all production facilities of the illicit stimulant, which became Syria's largest export under Assad.

"The latest seizure data from 2024 and 2025 confirm that captagon is continuing to flow — primarily to countries of the Arabian peninsula — possibly indicating the release of previously-accumulated stockpiles or continued production in different locations," UNODC said.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 26, 2025

Mainstreaming hate: When identity becomes a weapon

DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

Hate speech used to live in the shadows. You'd find it on fringe forums or in fiery sermons, but it didn't carry much weight. That's no longer true. Today, it sits at the center of our politics. It's deliberate. It's dangerous. And it's everywhere.

Across the Middle East and South Asia, identity is no longer just personal. It's political. From sectarian killings in Iraq to attacks on religious minorities in Pakistan, from Iran's crackdown on Baha'is and Kurds to Lebanon's deepening religious divide, identity has become a battleground. What once offered belonging is now used to control, divide, and incite.

In Pakistan, being Ahmadi means living with constant fear. You're legally labelled non-Muslim. You can't even call your mosque a mosque. Violence is always a threat, and the state rarely steps in. In Iran, the death of Mahsa Amini— arrested over her hijab— hit a nerve. She wasn't just a victim. She became a symbol for millions of women who live in fear every day.

These injustices aren't new. Back in the 1970s, psychologist Henri Tajfel showed how even trivial group differences could fuel bias. When those differences are religious or ethnic, the stakes become deadly.

The region's divides have deep roots, but they've been sharpened over time. The Sunni-Shia split, for instance, shapes politics, drives alliances, and fuels wars. Colonial powers made things worse by deepening these divisions to control their subjects. After independence, many governments kept using the same tactics— just under new flags.

Violence tied to identity is getting worse. The lynching in Sargodha last year over a false blasphemy charge wasn't a coincidence. It was part of a pattern. Since 1987, thousands in Pakistanis have been accused under these laws, often without any evidence. In Sialkot and Jaranwala, mobs have killed in the name of religion. These laws are often used to settle personal scores or grab land. When law becomes a tool for vengeance, justice disappears.

In Iraq, militias use sectarian violence to hold on to power. In Syria, sectarian exclusion helped spark a brutal civil war. In Iran, minorities live under constant surveillance. In Yemen, online hate adds fuel to an already raging fire.

Social media has made it worse. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and X reward outrage and disinformation. In places with low digital literacy, falsehoods spread fast— and kill. The Sargodha lynching began with a WhatsApp message. So did cow-related mob attacks in India. In Myanmar, Facebook became a weapon in a genocide.

Hate today isn't just shouted. It's coded, shared, boosted by algorithms, and spread across borders. We've handed our worst instincts a global megaphone.

So why don't governments step in? Because mobs often speak for powerful voter blocs. Taking them on can cost politicians dearly. In some cases, the state is complicit. In Pakistan, police often delay action or arrest the victims instead. In Iraq and Syria, militias and security forces are sometimes the same. Across the region, the law itself is often discriminatory— whether in Pakistan's anti-Ahmadi rules, Iraq's sectarian quotas, or Bahrain's two-tier justice system. When the state fears the mob— or becomes the mob— accountability disappears.

And paradoxically, identity politics today is not just about religion or ethnicity. It plays out along class lines too, where talk of empowerment often hides policies that silence the poor and protect the powerful. The personal is no longer simply political. It is punishable.

International pressure rarely works. Governments protect their interests. Human rights often take a back seat. That leaves civil society to carry the burden. In Pakistan, the Human Rights Commission keeps going despite constant threats. In Iraq, organizations like Al-Amal work to bridge divides. In Lebanon, lawyers challenge sectarian laws. In Bahrain and Iran, speaking out can mean prison— or exile.

There is still resistance. Student protests in Iran. Grassroots peace efforts in Iraq. These aren't just acts of defiance. They are reminders that a better way is possible.

What now?

We must call this what it is. This isn't "communal violence." It's hate, packaged as policy. Until governments admit that, nothing will change. In Pakistan, the blasphemy laws must be rewritten or repealed. In Iraq and Syria, discriminatory political structures must be dismantled. Countries that have signed on to global human rights treaties must be held to account.

Social media companies also have to act. Gaza has shown the failure of current content moderation. Global platforms allow hate to flourish while ignoring local context. That has to change. Oversight must be quicker, smarter, and actually enforced.

At home, we need more than symbolic gestures. Interfaith meetings aren't enough. Pluralism has to be taught in schools, woven into local governance, and reinforced in the media. Children must learn to live with difference from the start— not fear it.

We must stop seeing identity-based violence as inevitable. It isn't. It's made. And it can be unmade— but only if we recognize it, call it out, and stop pretending hate is governance.

Source: ARAB NEWS, JUNE 26, 2025

Cyber-Scam Criminals are Undermining Southeast Asia's Security

BY NIRMAL GHOSH

THE NAKED AND battered body of an 18-year-old Cambodian girl, Heng Seavly, was unearthed by police on March 1 from a shallow grave in Dangkor, one of the poorer districts of Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh.

Prior to her violent death, Heng Seavly had dropped out of school at the age of 15 to find work to help her parents pay off debts. She never missed sending money home, her mother said.Two men, Chinese nationals Chen Cong, 30, and Li Haohao, 34, were arrested in the case. Police said they confessed to having killed her because she was about to leak information about a cyber-scam operation in Phnom Penh.

Like many others, young and old, up and down the scam chain, Heng Seavly ended up as dust under the wheels of a multibillion-dollar transnational crime industry that has taken root in Southeast Asia, and particularly in grey zone borderlands and states characterized by poverty, conflict and corruption. "Cyber-scam operations exemplify a convergence of various forms of transnational organized crime on a large scale," notes a May 2025 report from the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GITOC) titled "Compound Crime: Cyber Scam Operations in Southeast Asia."

It is critical to see cyber scams not as local and one-dimensional, but as global and multidimensional criminal enterprises. The dovetailing of criminal enterprises including trafficking in persons, financial fraud, cybercrime, corruption and money laundering has been "accelerated by technological advances, blurred lines between criminal groups and private sector entities, corruption and the weak rule of law," the GITOC report says.

What makes the cyber-scam industry particularly pernicious is not just the visible damage it wreaks, but the insidiousness with which it undermines the legitimate economies of legitimate states. "Local elites — from elected officials and influential business owners to leaders of armed groups — play a significant role in driving and facilitating cyber scams," the GITOC report notes. "These include 'role shifters,' who can be defined as individuals who simultaneously hold positions in government, business and criminal networks or shift between those roles. They influence both the criminal ecosystem and the policy responses to it."

The scale of the industry is staggering. A May 2024 report by the US Institute of Peace (USIP) calculated that as of the end of 2023 scam centers operating out of Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos alone accounted for US$39 billion in stolen funds. Many of the scams practice so-called pig butchering — grooming and luring targets into Internet romances designed to extort their money.

Many victims have lost significant amounts of money — in some cases entire life savings. Some have killed themselves.

In many cases, they have been scammed by people who are themselves victims of human trafficking and semi-enslaved labor; many hundreds of citizens from more than 50 countries have been rescued from scam centers across Southeast Asia, most of them lured to work in them and then not allowed to leave.

"Cyber-scam operations exemplify a convergence of various forms of transnational organized crime on a large scale," says Kristina Amerhauser, a Senior Analyst at GITOC. "The harms extend beyond the countries in the Mekong where the scam operations are based, not least because people are scammed around the world and they are recruited globally. They also go beyond money lost or victims trafficked. Cyber scams impact rule of law and good governance, change the social fabric of communities and influence international relations."

In October 2024, Cambodian police rescued 67 Indian nationals from illegal scam centers in the sleazy, casino-lined border town of Poipet. In February, more than 250 people from 20 countries — mostly Asian and African — who had been working in scam centers in Myanmar's Karen State, were released by an ethnic armed group, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army — one of several armed factions controlling territory in the area.

The growth of the industry is evident from satellite pictures of scam towns. Areas like KK Park in Myawaddy in Myanmar, and Pursat and Tbong Khmum in Cambodia, as recently as 2022, were just a few scattered buildings among green fields; today they are small cities built on the misery of victims and often run by criminal kingpins whose identities are invariably well known but seemingly remain untouchable, their criminal empires lubricated by corruption.

ARMIES AND MILITIAS

On May 5, for instance, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned the Karen National Army (KNA), an ethnic militia in Myanmar, as a transnational criminal organization. Named were KNA leader Saw Chit Thu and his two sons, Saw Htoo Eh Moo and Saw Chit Chit, for their role in facilitating cyber scams, human trafficking and cross-border smuggling.

The KNA is no ordinary transnational crime organization. As its name implies, it is an army — and it controls territory. Saw Chit Thu has been described by the Thai newspaper The Nation as a "master of defection and betrayal [who has] secured wealth, influence and control over the illicit underworld along the Thai-Myanmar border." In December 2023, the United Kingdom sanctioned him for alleged involvement in forced labor schemes. Thailand's Department of Special Investigations is also reportedly seeking his arrest on human trafficking charges.

"The KNA-controlled region, located on the Thai-Burmese border, is home to multiple cyber-scam syndicates, and the KNA has benefited from its connection to Burma's military in its criminal operations," the US Treasury's notice said. "Although statistics vary, American victims of cyber

scams like the ones emanating from Burma have collectively lost billions of dollars over the last three years."

Similarly, take Zhao Wei, the notorious boss of the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) just over the border from Thailand in Laos, along the broad Mekong River. Apparently a Chinese national, he has been sanctioned by the US Treasury since January 2018, but seven years later he still seems to be thriving. "The Zhao Wei crime network engages in an array of horrendous illicit activities, including human trafficking and child prostitution, drug trafficking, and wildlife trafficking," the Treasury notice said. "We are targeting key figures in this transnational criminal organization, which stretches from the Kings Romans Casino in Laos throughout Southeast Asia," said Sigal Mandelker, then Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

Many of these criminal organizations are run by Chinese nationals. Recently, China has become concerned at their proliferation and the damage they do to its own citizens. This blew up in January when Chinese actor Wang Xing was lured to Thailand for a film shoot and, after arriving in Bangkok, found himself being driven to Mae Sot, on Thailand's border across from Myawaddy in Myanmar. Wang was texting with his girlfriend in China, but went silent after he reached Mae Sot. Alarmed, she alerted Chinese police and consular officials in Thailand and went public on social media. The uproar prodded Thai police into action and, in an operation whose details remain unknown, they retrieved Wang Xing from Myawaddy and brought him back to Thailand. Subsequently, China sent its assistant minister for public security, Liu Zhongyi, to the Thai-Myanmar border at Mae Sot, apparently to assess operations and inspect facilities for rescuing and repatriating victims — but raising eyebrows in Thailand over China's reach and influence.

DANGER SPREADING

Yet another incident, on May 3, underlined the reality that crime syndicates in the region operate their own security forces or collaborate with armed groups — usually in exchange for a slice of the lucrative pie. As such, the industry further undermines the national security and sovereignty of already shaky states.

The setting was sleepy, bucolic Laos, where backpackers flock to sip cappuccinos and break flaky fresh croissants in languid Luang Prabang, or, beers in hand, float down the Mekong on rubber tubes. But not all is quite what it seems. According to a report in the Laotian Times, on the evening of May 3, a Lao border guard unit on patrol near the Thai border in the northern Lao province of Bokeo, was ambushed by a heavily armed drug trafficking group. The attack killed at least two Lao soldiers. The gun battle lasted hours, with stray bullets zinging across the nearby border with Thailand, reportedly hitting a few rooftops.

There is speculation that the attack was in retaliation for a crackdown on drug trafficking; on April 21, in a case considered one of the largest in Laos' history, authorities had seized more than 20 million methamphetamine pills in Bokeo Province from an abandoned truck. The notorious GTSEZ is in Bokeo Province, which is part of the Golden Triangle where Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet — an area long part of global criminal folklore as a one-time heroin epicenter now morphed into the meth production hub of the Indo-Pacific and the cyber-scam hub of the world.

Crackdowns are certainly intensifying; regional governments are coming under pressure because their own citizens are targeted, raising questions about national security; plus pressure is rising from other countries, like China. Thailand recently cut off electricity and fuel supplies to scam centers in Myanmar. Lao and Cambodian police have conducted raids on scam centers.

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

But crackdowns are often done for the sake of appearances, and have a similar effect to disturbing an anthill — the ants will only scatter, dispersing to new places to build new bases. Scam centers are often so large that they generate ancillary economic activity — for instance retail and delivery services, and housing. This turns them into economic hubs. In December 2024, for example, the governor of the Lao province of Luang Namtha presented sanctioned GTSEZ boss Zhao Wei with a medal as an award for his contribution to development, reportedly praising his nearly US$60,000 contribution to the province's Police Command.

In the case of Thailand, government authorities in Bangkok may be serious about cracking down, one foreign diplomat acknowledged, but local authorities in border areas are often more ambiguous. "Transnational organized crime in Southeast Asia is evolving faster than at any previous point in history," according to an April report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). "It is now increasingly clear that a potentially irreversible spillover has taken place in Southeast Asia, leaving criminal groups free to pick, choose, and move jurisdictions, operations, and value as needed, with the resulting situation rapidly outpacing the capacity of governments to contain it," the report contends. "The region has emerged as a key testing ground for organized crime, which is reflected in increasing linkages to criminal ecosystems in other parts of the world facing similar vulnerabilities and challenges."

Several studies make the case that transnational fraud is perhaps the most dominant economic activity in the entire Mekong sub-region, equivalent to nearly half of total GDP in the primary host countries — Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos. In the case of Cambodia and Laos, state authority is challenged, co-opted and complicit, experts say.

TOO BIG TO FAIL

A new report titled "Policies and Patterns: State-Abetted Transnational Crime in Cambodia as a Global Security Threat," by the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC), cited research that has identified 350 scam compounds in Cambodia, averaging about 300 people per compound — though compounds range from 20-30 people, to as many as 15,000.

Rivaled only by Myanmar, Cambodia is likely the absolute global epicenter of next-gen transnational fraud and is certainly the country most primed for explosive growth going forward, the report contends. Scamming has become an enormously profitable domestic industry, likely unparalleled in Cambodia's history, with formal estimates of its scale ranging from US$12.5 billion to US$19 billion per year, equivalent to as much as 60 percent of the country's GDP.

Presenting the report at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand in May, author Jacob Sims spoke of a "profound state-crime nexus" in Cambodia. "The core central driver of this industry in

Cambodia is endemic systematic corruption and state involvement," said Sims, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University's Asia Center focusing on transnational crime, rights and security issues in Southeast Asia. The industry is "highly vertically integrated and state embedded," he said.

Lindsey Kennedy, the Phnom Penh based Research Director of The Eyewitness Project, speaking at the same event, said, "This is not corruption, this is the status quo." The scam industry is integral to Cambodia's entire economy, she said. "If they actually shut down all the scam centers tomorrow, the whole country would collapse," Kennedy told me in an interview.

Whether it's the drug trade or the online gaming and scam business, the exploitation of the region, and its global reach, is phenomenal, says Jeremy Douglas, UNODC chief of staff and strategy advisor, who has long focused on transnational crime in the Mekong region. "It is end-to-end misery," he told me. "People trafficked into forced criminality on the one end, and on the other end you have victims miserable because they are losing their life savings ... The way the scams have expanded and metastasized in the region, and the amount of money involved, is mind boggling."

For the region to see the issues as country-specific or mere bilateral problems only enables the industry to stay steps ahead, with kingpins remaining out of reach. The solution, experts say, is concerted regional co-operation. "This needs to go beyond dialogue and requires concrete measures that strengthen information sharing and co-operation between governments, particularly law enforcement agencies… but also strengthening regional private sector and civil society networks," the GITOC report recommends.

The UNODC's Douglas adds: "For years we've said it's possible, and now it's happening — parts of the region are being run by organized crime. They are more powerful and better resourced than states in some pockets, and that's frightening. The region is not adequately getting to grips with it," he warns. "At some point governments, and the region, will lose the ability to intervene effectively."

Source: GLOBALASIA.ORG, JUNE, 2025

13 security personnel martyred in North Waziristan suicide bombing

Thirteen security personnel were martyred in a suicide bombing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, carried out by Indian proxy Fitna-al-Khawarij, according to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

According to the military's media wing, a vehicle-borne suicide attacker targeted a security convoy in the district's Mir Ali area, before being intercepted by the convoy's lead vehicle.

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

"In their desperation, an explosive-laden vehicle was rammed by the Indian sponsored kharijis into one of the vehicles of the leading group," the ISPR stated. "Thirteen brave sons of [the] soil, embraced shahadat (martyrdom) [and] in this tragic and barbaric incident, two children and a woman [were also] severely injured."

The martyred personnel were identified as follows:

Subedar Zahid Iqbal, 45, from Karak

Havildar Sohrab Khan, 39, from Naseerabad

Havildar Mian Yousaf, 41, from Buner

Naik Khitab Shah, 34, from Lower Dir

Lance Naik Ismail, 32, from Naseerabad

Sepoy Rohail, 30, from Mirpurkhas

Sepoy Muhammad Ramzan, 33, from Dera Ghazi Khan

Sepoy Nawab, 30, from Quetta

Sepoy Zubair Ahmed, 24, from Naseerabad

Sepoy Muhammad Sahki, 31, from Dera Ghazi Khan

Sepoy Hashim Abbasi, 20, from Abbotabad

Sepoy Muddasir Ejaz, 25, from Layyah

Sepoy Manzar Ali, 23, from Mardan

The ISPR said that in ensuing sanitisation operations, 14 khawarij were "sent to hell" by the security forces. The statement added that operations in the area would continue and "the perpetrators of this heinous and cowardly act will be brought to justice".

"The security forces of Pakistan, in step with [the] nation, remain steadfast in their resolve to eradicate Indian-sponsored terrorism from the country, and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers and innocent civilians further reinforce our unwavering commitment to safeguarding our nation at all costs," the ISPR stated.

President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the attack on the security convoy and paid tribute to the 13 martyred personnel for their sacrifice in a statement from his office.

"The martyrs ensured the security of the motherland by sacrificing their lives," the president said, adding that those who give their lives to defend the homeland are "our real heroes".

"Such a cowardly attack cannot dampen the morale of the nation," Zardari said.

The president also paid tribute to the armed forces for killing 14 terrorists after the attack.

"[The] Pakistani nation and security forces are determined to root out Indian-sponsored terrorism," he said. "Operations will continue until terrorism is completely eradicated."

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also strongly condemned the attack in a statement from his office, paying tribute to the 13 martyred security personnel.

Expressing grief over the injury of innocent civilians, the PM said, "Indian-backed terrorists committed [a] cowardly act. The entire nation salutes the martyrs.

"We are resolute to completely eradicate all forms of terrorism from the country," the PM stated.

Earlier, a statement from the KP chief minister's office confirmed that eight security personnel were martyred in the blast. KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack and expressed his condolences and prayers for the martyrdom of the personnel.

"I salute security personnel and their families who have sacrificed their lives for the country and the nation," Gandapur was quoted as saying.

"Security forces have made unprecedented sacrifices to establish peace in the country and eliminate terrorism," the CM added. "These sacrifices further raise the resolve and morale of the nation against terrorism.

"Everyone in the nation stands with security forces in the war against terrorism," the statement concluded.

Initially, District Police Officer (DPO) Waqar Ahmed told Dawn.com that four civilians were injured in the "suicide attack" carried out through a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

The attack comes days after two soldiers were martyred and 11 terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in KP's South Waziristan district.

On June 15, a Frontier Corps (FC) soldier was martyred in a targeted gun attack in Ladha tehsil of Upper South Waziristan district.

Earlier this month, 14 terrorists were killed in North Waziristan's Datta Khel town during a security operation.

Militant groups were unable to significantly escalate their activities in the country last month, according to data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, which recorded 85 attacks in May compared to 81 in April.

The military has said India was using its "assets" to inte-nsify terrorist attacks in Pakistan, with ISPR Director General Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry detailing "irr-e-futable evidence" of an Ind-ian military personnel's involvement.

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

The country ranked second in the Global Terrorism Index 2025, with the number of deaths in terrorist attacks rising by 45 per cent over the past year to 1,081.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 28, 2025

Punjab's belated Countering Violent Extremism Act step

MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

FOR long, Punjab has been a fertile ground for religious extremist groups. The latter have been successful in cultivating a resilient political economy in the province.

This ecosystem has deepened its roots, and has frequently operated openly, caring little for potential legal consequences. The recent passage of the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Act in the province marks a significant, albeit delayed, policy development.

But it remains to be seen whether the law's enactment will actually translate into a meaningful shift in Punjab's posture, especially with regards to how its law enforcers engage with extremist actors who have continued to assert their presence publicly. In many instances, LEAs have not merely refrained from acting against such groups but have actually been seen to extend tacit or open support to them.

The problem of religious extremism is, of course, not limited to Punjab. It exists across Pakistan, from the tribal districts of KP to urban centres in Sindh, though its expression varies.

However, Punjab and urban Sindh continue to function as primary breeding grounds. Despite this reality, state institutions have largely hesitated to take on these networks head-on. Instead, they have opted to issue policy documents replete with lofty aspirations but lacking measurable outcomes.

With Punjab's move, all four provinces now have CVE legislation, with KP being the first to pass a CVE law and establish a dedicated centre under its higher education department in 2021. Balochistan followed with its version of the law in October 2024, placing the CVE framework under the anti-terrorism regime. Sindh passed a similar law in April, and Punjab completed the cycle on June 17, 2025, placing its CVE efforts under the purview of the home department.

However, except in the case of KP, none of the provincial CVE centres are as yet operational. Most of them are in various stages of the bureaucratic process. Meanwhile, at the federal level, the National Prevention of Violent Extremism Policy, 2024, was approved by the cabinet in December.

This policy had indicated the establishment of dedicated centres at the provincial level for various purposes, including research on countering violent extremism, media monitoring, and disseminating the national narrative. Whether these provincial initiatives will align with the federal framework or evolve into provincial silos is not clear. The language of the provincial laws suggests a degree of autonomy that may challenge the formation of a cohesive, national-level CVE architecture.

Ultimately, the real test lies not in the legislation itself but in the political will and institutional coherence required to translate policy into practice. Without that, the CVE framework risks becoming yet another document filed away in government archives, a merely symbolic gesture against a dangerous threat.

A closer look at the drafts of the recently pas-sed CVE Acts in the provinces reveals uniformity in the language, structure, and mandates — almost copy-pasted it would seem. Each province claims that its CVE centre will adopt a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to CVE, but the mandates are near identical, stressing research, policy development, strategic coordination and regular reviews.

The centres are tasked with developing action plans which support government bodies and international entities such as the FATF, and establishing mechanisms for intelligence gathering and dissemination.

These institutions are also designed to foster collaboration with religious leaders, civil society and experts, while building capacities through training modules, fellowships and public outreach initiatives. Youth, women, minorities and rural communities receive special focus, along with modern-day challenges such as online radicalisation, hate speech, and disinformation. International cooperation and media engagement are also central to this framework — all in the name of advancing social cohesion and constitutional values.

The CVE centres themselves are not unique either. Pakistan already hosts a range of institutions engaged in religious reform and the construction of national narratives, operating at both the federal and provincial levels. Among them are the Islamic Research Institute, the Idara Saqafat-i-Islamia, and various university departments with overlapping mandates.

Yet, instead of reforming and strengthening the existing bodies, the state continues to create new institutions which often have overlapping goals. The establishment of the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin Authority, despite the presence of multiple similar platforms, illustrates this trend of institutional duplication.

Previously, too, it has been pointed out on these pages that meaningful reform must begin with existing institutions, and that includes granting them the autonomy they need for genuine academic and intellectual discourse. A component of the current CVE framework includes campus surveillance, ostensibly to detect and report suspicious behaviour linked to violent extremism, drug use and criminal activity.

While public sector universities, already subjected to agency oversight, may comply with such measures, it remains uncertain whether madressahs and private institutions will allow similar scrutiny. Surveillance policies could disproportionately target public institutions, turning them into scapegoats rather than sites of transformation.

The problem of extremism in Pakistan cannot be addressed solely through legislation, CVE centres or narrative-building initiatives unless the state demonstrates the genuine political will to confront the networks and ideologies that sustain extremist groups.

As Senator Pervaiz Rasheed rightly observed in a recent Senate speech, the foundation of peace and cohesion lies in the guarantee of equal citizenship. That equality cannot be established through policy papers alone; it requires actively dismantling the hate infrastructure that targets religious minorities and fuels sectarian divisions.

The most critical task is bringing violent extremists under the rule of law. The repeated failure to do so has not only eroded the state's authority but has also turned legal institutions into objects of public cynicism.

For any counter-extremism initiative to work, police forces, LEAs and, most crucially, the lower judiciary must undergo serious reform and ideological deradicalisation. These institutions need to be capable of performing their duties free from guilt, bias or sympathy towards extremist narratives.

Source: DAWN, JUNE 29, 2025