

In This Issue

- Pakistan, India on US watch list for human trafficking
- September sees militants 'on back foot'
- Deadly numbers
- Drugs, Pakistani youth and Gulf futures
- Militant-linked violence in Pakistan soars in third quarter: report
- Terror surge
- Pakistan elected to UNHRC for 2026-28 term: FM Dar
- Pakistani passport ranks 4th worst in world for fifth straight year
- Conviction rate in gender-based violence cases stands at just 1.2pc, Karachi moot told
- Going nowhere
- Safeguards being added to blasphemy laws: law minister
- The TLP issue
- Police directed to implement pilot project on criminal justice system
- Commission being formed to protect minority rights
- Pakistan Navy ship seizes drugs worth nearly \$1bn in Arabian Sea
- The 'hard state' approach
- TLP ban
- More than 60 UN members sign cybercrime treaty opposed by rights groups
- Support the UN for the 21st century
- Weapon displays
- Unhappy with NCCIA, Punjab to set up its own agency
- Libyan boat capsize tragedy: Two human traffickers handed down 20-year RI, Rs1.4m fine each
- Going rogue
- State & religious extremism
- Dismantling violent groups
- Diagnosing organised crime
- Intricate landscape
- Militants suffered highest number of losses in 10 years in October



Pakistan, India on US watch list for human trafficking

WASHINGTON: The US State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2025 has placed both Pakistan and India among the countries that do not fully meet minimum standards for eliminating trafficking but are making "significant efforts" to do so.

The annual report, released in Washington, reviews efforts by governments worldwide to combat human trafficking, which the State Department defines as modern-day slavery involving forced labour, sexual exploitation, and other forms of coercion.

The report identifies Pakistan as a destination for men, women, and children subjected to forced labour, particularly migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Traffickers also exploit women and girls — and to a lesser extent, boys — from Afghanistan, Iran, and other Asian countries in sex trafficking within Pakistan.

The report notes that individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual remain highly vulnerable to exploitation. Since Pakistani law criminalises same-sex conduct, these groups face systemic discrimination and violence, further heightening their risk of being trafficked.

Civil society organisations told US officials that large-scale violence against women and girls, including so-called "honour killings," leaves women especially susceptible to trafficking networks. The report highlights that refugees and stateless persons are among the most vulnerable. This includes Afghans without proper documentation, stateless people of Bengali, Bihari, and Rohingya origin, as well as religious and ethnic minorities such as Christians, Hindu Dalits, and Hazaras. Many of these groups are trapped in bonded labor schemes.

Afghans — both undocumented migrants and registered refugees — face additional risks due to frequent harassment by authorities and the threat of deportation. Lacking legal protections, many turn to the informal economy for work, where they are easily exploited.

The report also criticises Pakistan for not having a clear definition of "statelessness". International organisations estimate that hundreds of thousands of stateless people in the country lack access to basic identity documents and essential services, leaving them particularly vulnerable to traffickers.

"Traffickers exploit Rohingya ethnicity stateless persons and Afghans in forced labour in Pakistan," the report warns.

The report also keeps India in Tier 2 — countries making efforts but falling short of minimum standards. India, it says, demonstrated "overall increasing efforts" compared to the previous reporting period. Positive steps included greater funding for specialised courts handling child-

related crimes (including trafficking), prevention campaigns, and the repatriation of Indian nationals exploited in online scam operations in South-east Asia.

The Indian government also expanded awareness programs on safe overseas employment and improved victim identification procedures through the Railway Protection Force. Advisories were issued to state governments to curb trafficking and ensure foreign victims were not wrongly punished for immigration violations stemming directly from being trafficked.

New Delhi failed to provide comprehensive national data on investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers. Victim services remained insufficient and varied widely from state to state, while courts rarely awarded restitution to victims, leaving many waiting years for compensation.

The absence of an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate anti-trafficking policies further undermined efforts. Moreover, law enforcement often misclassified cases, particularly those involving bonded labour, and corruption among some government officials fueled a perception of impunity for traffickers.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 1, 2025

September sees militants ‘on back foot’

ISLAMABAD: While security forces put militants on the back foot in September, the first three quarters of 2025 saw nearly as much violence as witnessed in all of 2024. If this trend continues, the current year may turn out to be one of the deadliest in decades.

This is the crux of two reports, issued by Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) and the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), about militant violence in the country over the past month. According to PICSS, militant violence dropped significantly in Sept 2025, with both the number of attacks and militant capacity showing sharp declines compared to the record levels seen in Aug. The PICSS Militancy Database recorded 69 militant attacks in Sept — a 52 per cent reduction from August’s 143. These attacks resulted in 135 deaths and 173 injuries, whilst militants abducted at least 27 people.

The fatalities included 61 security personnel, 20 militants, and 54 civilians. Amongst the injured were 74 security personnel and 99 civilians. Compared with August, the number of martyred security personnel declined by 16pc, militant fatalities by 66pc, and civilian deaths by 17pc, reflecting a notable decrease in lethality. KP remained the most affected province, but also witnessed intensified counterterrorism actions. The province reported 45 attacks that killed 54 people and injured 49. In mainland KP, 25 attacks caused 33 deaths — 20 security personnel, nine militants, and four civilians — whilst 42 people were injured. Militants kidnapped nine individuals, while security forces carried out 22 operations, killing 88 militants, though five personnel lost their lives and five militants were arrested.

In the tribal districts (erstwhile Fata), 20 militant attacks claimed 21 lives — six security personnel, three militants, and 12 civilians — and injured seven. Militants also abducted four people, while security forces conducted 18 operations in these districts, killing 83 militants. However, 24 civilians also lost their lives during these actions. In Balochistan, 21 attacks claimed 79 lives — 33 security personnel, eight militants, and 38 civilians — and injured 122 others, including 37 security personnel and 85 civilians. Militants abducted 14 people. Security forces responded with seven major operations, killing 26 militants and arresting 10. Sindh experienced three attacks that killed two security personnel and injured two civilians. According to CRSS’s report, Pakistan witnessed an over 46pc surge in overall violence in its security landscape for the third quarter of 2025, with at least 901 fatalities and 599 injuries — amongst civilians, security personnel, and outlaws — resulting from 329 incidents of violence. “In just three quarters, 2025 has proven nearly as deadly as all of 2024, with 2,414 fatalities recorded compared to the entire tally of 2024 (2,546). With an entire quarter still remaining, this indicates that 2025 is on course to surpass last year’s toll. If the current trend continues, 2025 could mark one of the deadliest years in a decade,” the report stated.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 2, 2025

Deadly numbers

THE statistics related to the frequency of militant attacks in Pakistan released by two local think tanks are cause for concern. They highlight that the state needs a much more proactive counterterrorism policy. As per the Pakistan Institute of Conflict and Security Studies, the number of militant attacks in the country last month had dropped compared to August's figures. However, as a report from the Centre for Research and Security Studies points out, the current year may be the deadliest in a decade where terrorism-related fatalities are concerned. According to the PICSS findings, there were 69 militant attacks in September, causing 135 deaths. The overwhelming number of fatalities were those of security men and civilians. Also, in keeping with the general trend, KP and Balochistan were the hardest hit by terrorist violence, with the former recording 45 attacks in September, and the latter province witnessing 21 attacks. The most recent of these was Tuesday's deadly bombing targeting the Frontier Corps headquarters in Quetta. While there may have been a dip in militant violence last month, the overall numbers for 2025 are nevertheless extremely worrying. The CRSS says that in the first three quarters of this year, over 2,400 fatalities were recorded, which means that "2025 could mark one of the deadliest years in a decade".

Yet, despite the perturbing statistics, the sense of urgency to deal with the terrorist threat seems to be lacking within the corridors of power. This is so despite the fact that the country has lost a high number of troops and civilians. The state's response is more reactive, going after militants after every deadly incident of terrorism. In fact, the state needs to defeat both major insurgencies — the TTP-led campaign in KP and the separatist movement in Balochistan. While inimical external forces that are supporting these insurgencies need to be dealt with on the diplomatic front, we very much need to raise our own level of preparedness too. Pakistan cannot go through endless cycles of terrorist violence, followed by security operations, only for the situation to deteriorate once again. A mix of kinetic and policy actions are needed to address the core issues fuelling both insurgencies. While there should be zero tolerance for terrorism, the socioeconomic and political issues that are often used to 'justify' these violent campaigns also need to be addressed by the state.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 3, 2025

Drugs, Pakistani youth and Gulf futures

DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

Last month, Sindh police arrested a 19-year-old Karachi student caught delivering synthetic drugs to classmates. His payment was pocket change; the real cost was his future. In another case, a laborer bound for his first Gulf job was duped into carrying narcotics, only to land in a foreign prison as his family's hopes collapsed.

These arrests make headlines, but the masterminds behind the trade rarely face justice. For every seizure or street peddler caught, the profiteers remain untouched, the everyday story of this silent epidemic.

These are not isolated incidents; they are windows into a larger crisis. Pakistan's drug problem cannot be measured in seizures or arrests. It is about lives derailed, families broken and communities hollowed out. From our classrooms to Dubai's departure lounges, narcotics are carving a path of destruction while those at the top continue to thrive.

The Sindh crackdown has gone beyond headlines. Around schools and colleges, dozens of suspects have been rounded up, dens dismantled, and gangs placed under watch. Police have seized hashish, heroin, and a rising wave of synthetic drugs that fit in a pocket but can burn through a generation.

What sets these operations apart is the gangs' evolving playbook. No longer confined to street corners, deals now move through encrypted apps, social media and even food delivery riders embedding the menace into the rhythm of urban life.

This local picture mirrors a global surge: 316 million people used drugs in 2023, a 20 percent rise in a decade. The Gulf is struggling too: the UAE logged nearly 10,000 drug offenses in 2024, while Saudi Arabia reports thousands injecting opioids. Conflict has worsened addiction across the Middle East, fueling synthetics like Captagon. The regional addiction treatment market, now worth over \$824 million, shows the scale of the crisis.

Pakistan faces its own storm: 7.6 million users, including 860,000 heroin addicts, and around 1,200 opioid-related deaths annually. It is caught between Afghan supply routes and Gulf migrant corridors. The stakes are dire: addiction is not only a youth or health issue but a threat to remittances, reputation and regional stability.

And the stakes? Nothing less than Pakistan's future. For young people, addiction means education aborted, health wrecked, opportunity lost. For families, it means despair, stigma and financial ruin. For society, it means rising crime, money laundering and extremist financing. If narcotics are seen as flowing from our shores, Gulf migration channels could tighten and with them, the remittances that keep our economy afloat.

Geography makes Pakistan doubly vulnerable. Recent data show that drug trafficking in the region has surged, with Afghanistan's narcotics production reaching record levels and synthetic drug flows increasing sharply. With Afghanistan on its border, the country sits astride one of the world's busiest narcotics corridors.

At the same time, Gulf demand and Pakistan's labor migration intersect in dangerous ways. Routes that sustain livelihoods can morph into trafficking pipelines. Too often, unsuspecting migrants are turned into couriers, while women coerced or stigmatized become hidden victims of this epidemic.

Having served as Federal Secretary for Narcotics Control, I have seen the gaps up close. Too often, the dragnet catches only the small fish, students lured by peer pressure, workers cornered by poverty while the real profiteers stay safely in the shadows. Everyone knows the cartels, the crime syndicates and the narco-terror pipelines that bankroll them, yet bringing down their masterminds remains an enigma. Until the system finds the courage to go after them, we are only cutting leaves while the roots keep spreading.

The myths surrounding narcotics worsen the problem. The first: that arrests alone will solve it. They won't. Crackdowns without prevention, awareness and rehabilitation simply create space for the next gang. The second: that every trafficker is irredeemable. Many are ordinary young people trapped by manipulation or despair. Treating them as hardened criminals only entrenches the cycle. What they need is a way back through counselling, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Future trends are sobering. Digital platforms, dark web markets, and cryptocurrency payments are reshaping trafficking. Synthetic drugs will spread because they are cheaper, easier to produce, and harder to detect. Migration and pilgrimage routes will remain vulnerable. And if Gulf states come to view Pakistan as a source country, remittance flows, the backbone of our economy will hang in the balance.

This is why the Sindh crackdown matters. It is more than a police action; it is a chance to reset strategy. Enforcement must be paired with prevention, community networks, school awareness, rehabilitation centers, and migrant safeguards. Crucially, Pakistan must engage Gulf partners not just in intelligence but in shared solutions: curbing demand, regulating labor flows, and supporting reintegration.

Because this crisis is not abstract. It is about real students slipping from classrooms into gangs, real laborers leaving for jobs but ending up in jails, real families whose silence hides addiction. Policing can disrupt, but only a whole-of-society response, law enforcement, educators, parents, health-workers, policymakers and regional allies can break the cycle.

If left unchecked, narcotics will corrode Pakistan's youth, damage its global standing, and choke its economic lifelines. But seized wisely, this moment could turn operations into a blueprint for a Pakistan-Gulf strategy against drugs. Fighting narcotics is not just about crime control, it is about saving futures.

SOURCE: ARAB NEWS, OCTOBER 4, 2025

Militant-linked violence in Pakistan soars in third quarter: report

Violence has surged over the past three months due to a spike in militant attacks and intensified counter-terrorism operations, the Islamabad-based think tank Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) said.

In a quarterly report, CRSS reported a 46 per cent rise in fatalities, including civilians, security personnel and terrorists, compared to the previous quarter. The think tank recorded 901 fatalities and 599 injuries resulting from 329 incidents of violence, including terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations. The report noted that this year is on track to be deadlier than 2024 — already the most violent year in a decade.

The surge reflects an “intensification of militant violence and the expanded scale of counter-terrorism operations”, CRSS said. “With an entire quarter still remaining, ... 2025 is on course to surpass last year’s toll,” the report read. “If the current trend continues, 2025 could mark one of the deadliest years in a decade.”

There were 2,414 deaths in the first three quarters of 2025, nearing the 2,546 fatalities reported in 2024, according to the think tank. The report added that when comparing casualty numbers from January to September 2024 (1,527 fatalities) to this year, 2,414 fatalities were recorded within the same period — an increase of 58pc.

“However, the source of fatalities has shifted; in 2024, security operations caused 505 deaths (33pc of the total), while terror attacks claimed 1,022. In 2025, security operations accounted for 1,265 deaths — over half of the total fatalities. This shift underscores how the state’s response has intensified, with security forces inflicting heavier losses on militants,” the report read.

Attacks have increased since the withdrawal of US-led troops from neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021, with the federal government accusing the Taliban authorities of sheltering terrorists — a charge they deny. However, the United Nations has warned of a “permissive environment” for militant groups in Afghanistan.

Government officials told AFP in September on condition of anonymity that the presence of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — designated Fitna al Khawarij by the authorities — had increased in recent months. That same month, opposition lawmakers accused the military of carrying out an air raid on militant hideouts that killed children.

Local village councils have repeatedly warned that sweeping counter-terrorism operations would risk harming civilians.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 6, 2025

Terror surge

AS Pakistan's battle against militancy persists, a heavy toll is being extracted as the country continues to lose a large number of security men in confrontations with terrorists. Frequent terrorist attacks also raise the question of the use of foreign soil — specifically Afghan territory — by anti-Pakistan militants.

Eleven personnel, including two officers, were martyred in KP's Orakzai tribal district earlier this week as they battled TTP terrorists during an intelligence-based operation. Meanwhile, ISPR said on Thursday that a major was martyred during a counterterrorism operation in Dera Ismail Khan, while officials confirmed a policeman was martyred when TTP militants attacked a checkpoint in a separate incident in D.I. Khan.

Taking note of the uptick in violence, the corps commanders' conference on Wednesday pledged to continue CT operations "across all domains" in order to crush the banned TTP and Baloch separatist insurgencies. Moreover, the country's top generals highlighted a "nexus between terror and crime with vested political patronage", while vowing to dismantle it.

There needs to be further clarification of this nexus. In the past, for example, there was evidence of political parties having militant wings in Karachi. Is this what is being referred to, or has a fresh threat emerged?

With regard to the high losses amongst security men, there is an urgent need to address this issue, as the country cannot afford to lose so many personnel in terrorist attacks. Most troop losses are reported during IBOs. Perhaps there is a need to change tactics, in order to stay ahead of terrorist groups.

Concerning the use of Afghan soil by militant groups, the issue recently came up during discussions between regional states at the Moscow Format Consultations. Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan reiterated at the moot the need to "dismantle all terrorist groups operation from Afghanistan". The joint statement issued by the participating countries, which included Afghanistan, Russia, China and Iran, among others, similarly reminded Kabul that terrorism in the country "constitutes a serious threat to ... Afghanistan, the region and the wider world".

Therefore, along with shoring up defences at home, Pakistan needs to work with partners in the region to ensure that the message is clearly communicated to the Afghan Taliban regime: regional integration and hosting bloodthirsty terrorist groups cannot go hand in hand.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 10, 2025

Pakistan elected to UNHRC for 2026-28 term: FM Dar

Pakistan has been elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2026-2028 term, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said.

The United Nations General Assembly also announced 13 other countries for the term beginning on January 1, 2026, namely: Angola, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, India, Iraq, Italy, Mauritius, Slovenia, South Africa, United Kingdom and Viet Nam.



“My profound gratitude to all UN Member States for their support!” FM Dar said on X. “Pakistan’s election is a recognition of its strong credentials and contributions in strengthening the global human rights framework.”



Dar reiterated Pakistan’s commitment to work with the international community on the basis of “TRUCE”, i.e., tolerance, respect, universality, consensus-building, and engagement.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed delight at the development, saying it reflected Pakistan’s effective and active role at the United Nations.

“We reaffirm Pakistan’s strong commitment to play an active role in the council for the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe,” he added.

UN Human Rights Council @UN_HRC

🔴 @UN General Assembly elects 14 members to the 🇺🇳 Human Rights Council for 2026–2028 term:

Angola, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, India, Iraq, Italy, Mauritius, Pakistan, Slovenia, South Africa, United Kingdom and Viet Nam

Term begins: 1 January 2026 un.org/en/ga/60/meeti...

Election results for membership of the Human Rights Council for 2026-2028

- Angola
- Chile*
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- Estonia
- India
- Iraq
- Italy
- Mauritius
- Pakistan
- Slovenia
- South Africa*
- United Kingdom
- Viet Nam

*second consecutive term

14 October 2025

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وزیراعظم محمد شہباز شریف کا اقوام متحدہ کی انسانی حقوق کونسل میں سال 2026 سے 2028 تک نئے رکن کے طور پر پاکستان کی شمولیت پر اظہار مسرت
@CMShehbaz

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- پاکستان کا اقوام متحدہ انسانی حقوق کونسل کا رکن منتخب ہونا اقوام متحدہ میں پاکستان کے موثر اور بھرپور کردار کو عکاس ہے: وزیراعظم
- ہم دنیا بھر میں انسانی حقوق کا سر بلندی کے لئے کونسل میں پاکستان کے بھرپور کردار کے عزم کا اظہار کرتے ہیں: وزیراعظم

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SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 14, 2025

Pakistani passport ranks 4th worst in world for fifth straight year

 Pakistan's Historical Ranking on the Henley Passport Index



Pakistan's ranking on the Henley Passport Index from 2006 to 2025. — screengrab via Henley's website

The Pakistani passport has ranked the fourth worst for the fifth straight year, according to this year's Henley Passport Index, a ranking of the world's 199 passports based on the number of destinations their owners can access without a prior visa.

In the latest global ranking issued on October 7, Pakistan's travel document was placed at 103 in the list tied with Yemen and ranked higher than only those of Iraq (104), Syria (105) and Afghanistan (106).

Per the ranking, Pakistan and Yemen's passports permit visa-free access to 31 countries only out of 227 travel destinations, Iraq's allows travel to 29, Syria's gives access to 26 destinations, and Afghanistan's travel document only affords the bearer access to 24 destinations without a visa.

Pakistan's passport has been declared the world's fourth worst since at least 2021 on the Henley index, which calculates countries' "visa-free score" — the number of destinations travellers can access without a prior visa, or with a visa on arrival.

The travel document placed 100th on the list in 2024 and 2023, 109th in 2022 when it allowed entry into 32 countries sans a prior visa, and 107th in 2021 with the same visa-free score.

The top spot yet again belonged to Singapore, as its passport provides citizens visa-free access to 193 destinations, followed closely by South Korea in second place with a visa-free score of 190, and Japan ranking third with 189 destinations its citizens can visit without a visa.

Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland rank fourth, with visa-free access to 188 locations.

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland and the Netherlands rank fifth with a visa-free score of 187.

Also notable was that for the first time since the Henley Passport Index was created 20 years ago, the United States has fallen out of the world's top 10 most powerful passports.

“Once unrivalled at No.1 in 2014, the American passport has now slumped to 12th place, tied with Malaysia, with visa-free access to only 180 of 227 destinations worldwide,” Henley said in a press release.

Similarly, the British passport has slipped to its lowest-ever position on the index, dropping from sixth to eighth since July, despite also once holding the top spot in 2015.’

The United Arab Emirates’ passport, which entered the top 10 for the first time last year, hiked one spot, moving to eighth with a visa-free score of 184.

China’s passport, which ranked 59th last year with 85 destinations accessible without a visa, dropped to 64th with its visa-free score lowering to 82.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 15, 2025

Conviction rate in gender-based violence cases stands at just 1.2pc, Karachi moot told



There is no centralised GBV database, hindering data analysis, activist says.

KARACHI: A dialogue on the provincial action plan on prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) held here saw many members of the civil society discuss how to pave the way for justice in such cases.

The event was organised by the Sindh Women Lawyers Alliance (SWLA) in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP).

Starting the discussion, advocate Shazia Nizamani said that in order to effectively combat gender-based violence in Sindh, institutional actions must focus on strengthening systems, enforcing laws and fostering coordination across government, judicial, law enforcement and civil society sectors.

“But, only 1.2 per cent of GBV cases result in convictions due to weak prosecution and judicial delays. There is also no centralised GBV database, hindering data analysis. Besides, due to resource constraints, shelters and crisis centres, GBV courts, police protection cells and the likes are underfunded,” she added.

“The police and judiciary often lack training, leading to mishandling of cases. There is also a patriarchal mindset in the judiciary, the legal community and law enforcement authorities,” she observed.

It was explained that the objective of having a provincial action plan was to have system reforms and social change to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in GBV incidents by 2030, increase conviction rates to minimum 20 per cent by 2030 through GBV survivor and survivor-centric scientific investigation and reduce judicial delays.

The advocate also recommended the establishment of district-level emergency response centres to provide immediate medical, legal and psychological support to GBV survivors; increasing women representation in the police, judiciary, ombudsperson office and as medico-legal officers, besides having professionally trained psychologists in hospitals, police stations, women protection cells and shelter homes.

She also suggested the implementation of anti-rape special courts, crisis centres and victim & witness protection programmes.

Rape and abuse cases must be investigated with full responsibility, sensitivity and a survivor-centric approach, ensuring justice and dignity.

Moreover, there should be capacity building of police. They should have specialised training of gender-responsive handling of GBV cases in accordance with international and national legal standards.

More recommendations included online FIR registration, human rights and women rights education as part of the curriculum along with sexual education.

The former chairperson of the Sindh Commission on the Status of Women, Nuzhat Shirin, said that since there is no budget for special courts, the regular courts should be made more effective.

Rights activist and GBV expert Khalida Mallah said that there was a need to reach out to donors to see how the initiatives suggested by Advocate Nizamani could be funded.

Community engagement expert Dr Kausar S. Khan brought up the concept of patriarchal bargaining.

“It gives ownership for GBV advocacy in communities. Communities should be provided awareness because victims trust their communities,” she pointed out.

Chandan Malhi of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) said that departments and civil society organisations that are there to spread awareness should at least know the laws. “There are many helplines but no one nowadays speaks or gives advice on the basis of existing laws,” he said.

Minority rights activist Seema Maheshwari said that there is a need to train data collectors. “There needs to be one mode of data collection. But out here the data taker confuses everyone by putting in wrong information in the categories provided because he or she simply doesn’t understand what to put where,” she said.

Human rights activist Anita Pinjani said that there was a need to interview both the educated class and rural people in order to understand their mindsets and how they see women. “It will give you a clue as to why laws passed to aid women are not implemented,” she said.

Transgender rights activist Masooma Umar Rasool said that when people are afraid to fight for their rights in case of gender-based violence, then transgender people are in an even worse situation. “The police, too, lack sensitivity to deal with transgender victims,” she said.

“The transgender law is based on protection for the community but we are not getting any protection,” she added.

Huzaifa Gill said that due to feeling unsafe, many transgender persons do not come out to reveal their identity. “Inclusion in society means providing an environment where one feels safe not to pretend to be someone else,” he said.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 17, 2025

Going nowhere

PAKISTAN has done it again. The country has held on to its spot near the bottom of the Henley Passport Index, ranking 103rd out of 106, just above Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. For the fifth time in a row, our passport holds the dubious distinction of being among the world's least powerful. Consistency demands commitment and successive governments have shown plenty of that, especially when it comes to standing still. While others jostle up and down the index, Pakistan's passport remains a model of stability. Holders of the green booklet can travel visa-free to a grand total of 31 destinations — a list that mostly includes islands most have never heard of and countries one might only encounter in a geography quiz. Meanwhile, top spot holders, Singaporeans, can breeze into 193 destinations, and South Koreans into 190.

One could blame geopolitics, global suspicion, or our own bureaucratic enthusiasm for paperwork. But the truth is that passport strength reflects far more than airport convenience: it mirrors international trust, governance standards and economic credibility. The weaker the state, the weaker its passport. And ours, sadly, carries the weight of poor diplomacy, inconsistent policies, and a brand image that does not inspire confidence abroad. What can be done? For starters, the government might invest in the kind of soft power that cannot be stamped or embossed — improving governance, security, and regional relationships. Trade, tourism and academic exchange do more for mobility than slogans about 'image building'. A modern passport design or biometric upgrade will not help if the world continues to view Pakistan as unpredictable rather than a reliable partner with a coherent vision for engagement. Until then, Pakistanis can take comfort in the one privilege our passport still offers: the ability to stay firmly grounded. After all, who really needs jet lag anyway?

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 17, 2025

Safeguards being added to blasphemy laws: law minister



Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar addresses a symposium on “Interfaith Harmony and Fundamental Rights – A Constitutional Imperative”

- **Azam Nazeer Tarar urges judiciary to uphold constitutional rights, protect vulnerable communities**
- **CJP calls for ensuring that principles of harmony and equality are reflected in judicial practice**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said that procedural safeguards were being introduced by the government in blasphemy-related cases to prevent misuse of the law, and ensure timely justice.

Speaking at a symposium on “Interfaith Harmony and Fundamental Rights – A Constitutional Imperative”, the minister urged members of the judiciary to continue providing leadership in protecting constitutional rights and guiding jurisprudence to safeguard vulnerable communities.

Jointly organised by the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP) and the Federal Judicial Academy (FJA), the symposium was held at the Supreme Court auditorium.

The minister appealed to religious leaders to use their influence to promote compassion, humanity, and tolerance, noting that their voices shape hearts and minds.

He further urged educators and media professionals to use their platforms to amplify messages of pluralism and social cohesion, while encouraging business leaders and civil society to invest in community projects that promote equal economic opportunities across social divides.

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, in his welcome address earlier, said the message of Islam, from the very beginning, has been peace, compassion and respect for all humanity.

Referring to the theme of the symposium, the CJP said the purpose of dialogue on interfaith harmony was not merely understanding and transformation but ensuring that the principles discussed should also be reflected in judicial practice.

He expressed hope that the dialogue on interfaith harmony would bring Pakistan closer to a society where rights are not only declared but also realised, where justice is not delayed but delivered, and where the law serves as a common language of peace and equality.

Speaking next, Dr Al-Issa who has also served as head of the Saudi Judiciary and delivered the sermon at Arafat during the 2022 Haj, said Pakistan was considered as one of the leading international models in preserving the rights of minorities. He lauded the Supreme Court for its role as the guardian of Pakistan's Constitution.

Former CJP Tassaduq Hussain Jilani emphasised that the judiciary has a sacred constitutional duty to protect equality, pluralism, and the rule of law.

Declaration adopted

Meanwhile, a declaration on interfaith harmony adopted at the conclusion of the symposium called for integrating interfaith sensitivity and human rights education within the justice sector; strengthening institutional mechanisms for the protection of minorities and the realisation of fundamental rights; promoting interfaith harmony, social inclusion, and mutual respect as the foundation of fundamental rights; and upholding the constitutional promise of equality and justice for all citizens.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 17, 2025

The TLP issue

THE state's crackdown on the TLP is in full swing. On Monday, members of the far-right party and LEAs clashed in Muridke, as the state aborted the group's attempt to march on Islamabad, apparently to protest in front of the US embassy in 'solidarity' with Gaza.

From then onwards, the TLP's leaders have reportedly gone underground, thousands of supporters have been rounded up, while the group's mosques and madressahs are being seized by the state. Unlike previous clashes between the TLP and the government, this time it appears that the rulers aim to dismantle the religiously inspired party permanently. On Friday, the Punjab information minister said the summary to ban the TLP had been sent to the centre. Earlier, several federal ministers said that the crackdown would not relent. This would be the second ban in the TLP's turbulent decade-old history. However, simply publishing a notification in the official gazette may not be enough to deal effectively with the TLP phenomenon. In Pakistan's history of far-right religious activism, most sectarian and jihadi groups have belonged to the Deobandi or Ahle Hadith schools, while there have also been a few prominent Shia militant groups.

The TLP, meanwhile, represents the Barelvi school, and has used emotive topics such as blasphemy and other sensitive religious issues to mobilise the public. Its history is certainly problematic. It has on numerous occasions clashed with the law, while its role in organising mobs has also been troubling. Moreover, it has supported violent campaigns against minority groups, including Christians and Ahmadis, particularly in Punjab, targeting the places of worship of these communities. The TLP is also a major political force, getting millions of votes in the last general elections. Therefore, while an official clampdown may provide temporary relief, it might not produce long-term results.

Banning groups in Pakistan has not proved effective in countering extremist violence. For example, the first major bans were put in place during the Musharraf regime. Many of the groups remain active more than two decades after they were 'banned', changing their names several times.

If the state really wants to address the issue of the TLP and other violent groups, instead of bans, it should focus on prosecuting the leaders and activists who promote and participate in violence and who actively engage in hate speech. Because the state has been weak thus far in enforcing the law, powerful violent groups have gained the confidence to continue with their disruptive activities. Groups must be free to organise, but no one can be allowed to advocate violence against any community, or endorse hate speech.

Moreover, protests must remain peaceful. If the state 'bans' groups, then loses interest and starts looking away, these outfits will re-emerge, and the cycle of violence and confrontation will continue in perpetuity.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 18, 2025

Police directed to implement pilot project on criminal justice system

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court has directed police to implement a pilot project in the provincial capital for strengthening criminal justice system.

A larger bench consisting of PHC Chief Justice SM Attique Shah, Justice Sahibzada Asadullah, Justice Mohammad Ijaz Khan and Justice Salahud Din also sought report from the prosecution directorate indicating how many public prosecutors and investigating officers had been trained so far by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prosecution Academy, along with the training contents.

In its 10-page detailed order in the petitions highlighting flaws in criminal justice system (CJS) and seeking reforms in it, the bench issued multiple directives to different stakeholders of the system including police, prosecution, lawyers and other relevant government departments.

During previous hearing, the court had formulated several questions for stakeholders, seeking their replies. The bench was hearing two public interest petitions filed by a citizen Asifullah and a senior lawyer Shabbir Hussain Gigyani, respectively.

While several of the respondents, stakeholders and senior lawyers had submitted their responses, the bench directed other relevant officials to submit the same.

Barrister Amirullah Khan Chamkani appeared for petitioner Asifullah and pointed out that the independence of police had been compromised through KP Police (Amendment) Act, 2024, as powers of provincial police had been made limited and the petitioner also intended to challenge the same through a separate petition.

During course of hearing, the KP advocate general, Shah Faisal Uthmankhel, said that land had been acquired for establishment of Provincial Forensic Science Laboratory and PC-1 had been approved. However, he stated that due to lack of budget, no further progress had been made.

The bench directed additional chief secretary (home) and finance secretary to submit a report identifying hurdles to the project and explaining why the required funds were not allocated for its construction.

The additional inspector general (investigation), Mohammad Alam Khan Shinwari, informed the bench that implementation of comprehensive reforms across the province was presently not practicable due to the prevailing law and order situation, shortage of financial resources and inadequacy of trained human capital.

However, it was suggested that a pilot project might initially be undertaken in one district with the objective of strengthening criminal administration of justice, which could thereafter be evaluated and replicated in other districts based on its outcomes.

Under this initiative, the required number of trained SHOs, investigating officers, and other necessary resources and skills for its implementation would be identified. The bench directed to consider the pilot project for implementation in Peshawar district and submit a report in that regard.

The court also sought a report from prosecution directorate on the proposed pilot project for Peshawar, highlighting the required number of public prosecutors and other necessary resources.

The bench directed it to address in its report certain queries raised by it including why FIR were not available online and why challans (charge sheet) were not forwarded promptly; whether any accountability mechanism existed to evaluate performance of district public prosecutors and public prosecutors.

The bench summoned additional chief secretary home and tribal affairs, inspector general of police and provincial law secretary (home) for next date, which would be fixed later.

The bench directed the additional registrar (judicial) to issue notices to the presidents of all bar associations in the province and district and sessions judges and they should ensure that members of their respective bars practicing on the criminal side were duly informed of the matter under consideration.

The additional attorney general, Sanaullah, appeared for federal government along with law officer of the ministry of human rights, Fahad Azhar, and a representative of Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, Ghina-i-Sahar.

Shah Faisal Uthmankhel, additional advocates general Nomanul Haq Kakakhel and Niaz Mohammad appeared along with senior police officers and that of prosecution department.

Advocate Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, a former home secretary, submitted a 61-page written reply, addressing each of the 20 questions framed by the high court.

His submissions examined the structural causes of institutional dysfunction in justice system, including non-registration of FIRs, false cases, misuse of laws, defective investigation and weak accountability. Central to his analysis, however, was the recognition that the crisis of justice in Pakistan was fundamentally a crisis of training, professionalism and governance.

Several other lawyers well-versed in criminal jurisprudence including Mohammad Nisar Khan, Tariq Yousafzai, Mian Arshid Jan, Ijaz Khan, Imtiaz Khan, Yousaf Shah Mohmand, Saeed Khan, Mohammad Sareer Khan, Sahibzada Riazatul Haq, Tafseel Khan Afridi, Arif Jadoon, Farhatullah Khan, Aminur Rehman, Khurram Ghias Khan and a former superintendent of police Mian Naseeb Jan appeared on court notice and put forward their opinions.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 20, 2025

Commission being formed to protect minority rights



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif cuts a cake to mark Diwali with leaders of different faiths.

- **PM Shehbaz directs policy shift to boost industrial production**
- **Calls for promotion of cottage SMEs to achieve industrial development**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Sheh-baz Sharif revealed that the government was forming a National Commission for Minorities (NCM) to safeguard their rights.

“Parliament has given its approval and work is in progress on proposed National Commission for Minorities and the government has rolled out targeted support programmes from scholarships for minority students at primary through tertiary levels to representation of minorities in federal and provincial assemblies,” the PM said at a ceremony held at the PM House on Diwali.

He extended Diwali greetings to the Hindu community and other religious minorities, calling the festival a “beautiful message of joy, peace and tolerance” and reaffirming the government’s commitment to protecting minority rights.

Addressing the event, which was attended by religious and diplomatic figures, members of minority communities and parliamentary representatives, the prime minister said the presence of Hindu, Christian and other minority leaders at the event reflected “the living reality of Pakistan’s pluralism”.

He reiterated that every citizen regardless of faith has the constitutional right to practise religious rituals without fear or intimidation. He urged Muslims and non-Muslims to work “shoulder to shoulder” to resist hatred, intolerance and extremism and to preserve Pakistan as a land of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.



Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Kheal Das Ko-histani, on the occasion, paid tribute to the prime minister for organising Diw-ali celebrations officially at the PM House, making a unique historic moment.

Industrial production

PM Shehbaz Sharif on Monday directed the Power Division to develop effective policy recommendations aimed at enhancing domestic industrial production. He also urged all institutions involved in industrial production to take comprehensive measures to facilitate investors and industrialists.

Emphasising the government's commitment to supporting the agriculture and industrial sectors, the prime minister directed the formulation of a policy to maximise the beneficial use of the country's power production.



“Electricity production can be best leveraged to increase the output of agricultural and industrial goods,” he said while chairing a meeting on power sector reforms.

During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on a potential reform package focused on the comprehensive and efficient utilisation of the country’s power resources.

Registration of cottage SMEs

Later, presiding over a separate meeting on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), PM Shehbaz directed the authorities concerned to encourage the registration of cottage SMEs to enable them avail business loans and pave the way for country’s industrial growth.

The prime minister appreciated the initiatives to enhance women’s participation in SMEs and called for awareness on such measures. He emphasised setting up a clear timeline for the implementation of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority’s (Smeda) roadmap and its early execution.



The prime minister said the country's industrial growth was linked with the development of cottage SMEs and cited the developed countries where they provide raw material to large industries. The premier directed to conduct the training for SMEs in rural areas for processing of agricultural commodities. He expressed satisfaction with the industries and production ministry's efforts for Smeda's restructuring and SME development.

During the briefing on Smeda's restructuring and initiatives, it was informed that offices had been established in Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan for SME development, which was welcomed by the public and chambers of commerce. The meeting was told that a Smeda board comprising private sector experts had been formed, and the appointment of the chief executive officer will be finalised in the coming days. The participants were told that following the directives of the steering committee, a significant progress had been witnessed in SME capacity building, loan provision, and collaboration. Besides, an AI-powered women entrepreneurship platform is being established to provide women with comprehensive business-related information, including registrations, tax matters and skill awareness. Moreover, a roadmap for integrating SMEs into the formal economy was also presented during the meeting.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 21, 2025

Pakistan Navy ship seizes drugs worth nearly \$1bn in Arabian Sea



This image shows PNS Yarmook

Pakistan Navy ship Yarmook seized narcotics worth more than \$972 million from sailboats in the Arabian Sea, according to a statement issued from the naval network overseeing the operation.

The Combined Maritime Force (CMF), a naval partnership that includes the United States, said the Pakistani naval vessel intercepted two different dhow sailing boats within 48 hours last week. It was working in “direct support of Saudi-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 150” of the CMF during focused operation Al Masmak, which began on October 16.

“The crew boarded the first dhow and seized over two tons of crystal methamphetamine with an estimated street value of \$822,400,000 [on] October 18. Less than 48 hours later, the crew boarded a second dhow and seized 350 kilogrammes of [crystal meth] worth \$140,000,000 and 50kg of cocaine worth \$10,000,000,” the CMF statement said.

The narcotics were transported back to the ship for testing to confirm the contents and subsequently disposed of, the statement added.

The intercepted vessels were “identified as having no nationality”, it said without indicating where they had originated.

It was “one of the most successful narcotics seizures for CMF,” Royal Saudi Naval Forces Commodore Fahad Aljoiad, commander of the CMF taskforce carrying out the operation, was quoted as saying.

“The success of this focused operation highlights the importance of the multi-national collaboration,” he further stated.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Navy said in a statement that the achievement highlighted its “unwavering commitment to regional maritime security, global peace, and the collective fight against illicit trafficking at sea”.

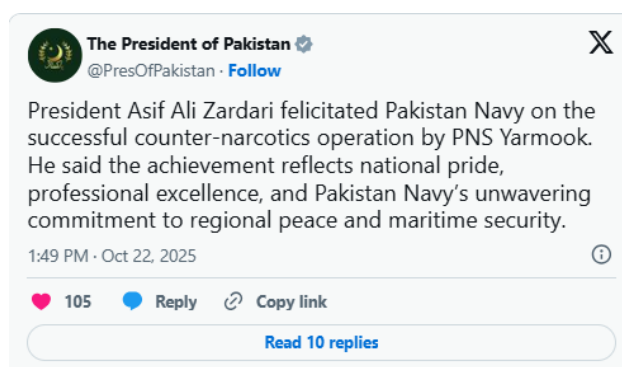
It further said that the successful operation reaffirmed Pakistan’s “active role as a responsible maritime partner contributing to peace and security in the wider Indian Ocean region”.

The statement further said that Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf commended the crew for their professionalism and dedication.

“He emphasised that Pakistan Navy remains steadfast in its mission to safeguard national maritime interests while contributing to the global commons through cooperation and coordinated maritime security efforts,” it quoted him as saying.

“The naval chief underscored that PNS Yarmook’s operation under Saudi-led task force will further enhance the interoperability between the two navies and strengthen defence collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia,” it added.

President Asif Ali Zardari said that the achievement reflected “national pride, professional excellence, and Pakistan Navy’s unwavering commitment to regional peace and maritime security”.



The US Central Command in a post on X congratulated the CMF, which includes 47 countries’ navies and patrols more than three million square miles of sea, including some of the world’s busiest shipping lanes, to disrupt the smuggling of drugs and weapons.

The commissioning ceremony for Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) Yarmook was held in Romania in February 2020 and it was inducted into the Pakistan Navy fleet in December 2020.



PNS Yarmook is an electronic warfare, anti-ship and anti-air platform with cutting edge self-protection and terminal defence systems. The ship is capable of performing a variety of maritime operations and unmanned aerial vehicle operations simultaneously.

In March last year, the vessel was employed in a rescue operation after a distress call from a boat, carrying eight Iranian fishermen, that had caught fire.

In July 2024, it was also deployed in the Indian Ocean with an embarked helicopter for the safety and security of merchant ships bound to and coming from the country's ports.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 22, 2025

The ‘hard state’ approach

AS the administration expands its dragnet around the TLP, there is once again talk in official circles of applying the ‘hard state’ approach to tackling extremism. It is clear that after the TLP’s latest gambit failed — marching on Islamabad in supposed solidarity with Gaza — and resulted in deadly showdowns with the law, the state is giving no quarter to the hard-line outfit.

In the latest developments, along with mulling a ban on the party, the Punjab government says around 3,800 financiers of the TLP have been identified. The federal interior minister, while on a visit to Karachi on Tuesday, also said that armed groups would not be tolerated. However, meeting with senior Barelvi clerics in the city, the minister assured them that the crackdown was not targeted at any particular sect. When Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was asked about the ban on TV, he did not confirm the decision. Yet he reiterated that Pakistan must act as a “hard state” to crack down on extremism.

The TLP’s tactics over its decade-long existence have been largely indefensible, as it has resorted to the use of violent agitation as an organisational tool, taking on the state at multiple junctures. Moreover, its campaigns of targeting minority groups have borne deadly results. In fact, it can be asked what took the state so long to notice its illegal, violent activities. Yet it is also true that in the guise of fighting extremism, the state must not crack down on all opposition, and trample on civil liberties. This is all the more important when some representatives of the state use overly broad definitions of extremism, and lump together political opponents with bloodthirsty militants and hatemongers.

There is genuine concern that in their excitement to build a ‘hard state’, the rulers may further smother fundamental rights, while justifying crackdowns on opposition parties, going after dissenting journalists and restricting peaceful protests — all in the name of fighting ‘extremism’. While violent groups must be put out of business, constitutional safeguards need to be upheld, and civil liberties protected.

As this paper has stated, instead of banning groups, the best way to proceed against outfits such as the TLP would be to prosecute them under relevant sections of the law, for example, those that deal with inciting violence and promoting hate speech. Sadly, proponents of the hard state overlook the root problems that have fuelled militancy in the country. In those parts of Pakistan that have been hardest hit by terrorist activity — KP and Balochistan — poverty, injustice and underdevelopment have helped militant groups increase their ranks.

Therefore, while those who promote violence must be prosecuted, the state’s long-term goal should be to promise justice, inclusivity and prosperity across the country, particularly in its deprived areas.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 23, 2025

TLP ban

AFTER the federal cabinet approved the ban on the TLP a day earlier, the interior ministry published a notification on Friday saying that the state believed there were “reasonable grounds” to proscribe the hard-line outfit due to its connection with “terrorism”.

Going by the government’s signals, a formal ban had seemed imminent after TLP cadres clashed with the state in a deadly showdown last week. The immediate trigger was the administration’s refusal to let the outfit march on Islamabad in supposed solidarity with Gaza. This would be the second time the religiously inspired party has been banned. The last proscription in 2021 lasted only a few months, but this time the state appears intent on sustaining the ban. However, one should keep in mind that extremist parties and groups have been banned earlier too, but have re-emerged under new monikers.

PML-N leader and adviser to the PM Rana Sanaullah has said that the state had no issue with the TLP’s religious views and the ban was not designed to ‘eliminate’ the party. Rather, it was supposed to purge “anti-state and terrorist elements”. Going by this logic, if the aim is to target individuals who break the law, why does the state ban parties and groups?

Moreover, in the past, how many heads of militant groups, sectarian outfits and extremist parties have been tried for their crimes? The state’s history of banning groups — from the Musharraf era to date — does not inspire confidence, as outfits are proscribed on paper, but cases against their leaders and active cadres are not diligently pursued. There is also the genuine fear that the powers that be may apply the labels of ‘terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ to ban political parties that have fallen afoul of the state.

In reality, the policy of banning groups is tragicomic. Nacta’s current list of proscribed organisations contains over 80 entries, with some going as far back as 2001. Most of the groups that populate this list ascribe to jihadi, sectarian or extremist ideologies, with a smattering of separatist and ethno-nationalist outfits. But the modus operandi of ‘banned’ groups is to restart work under new names after the ban. For example, Jamaatud Dawa, an incarnation of Lashkar-i-Taiba, has at least 10 aliases, most of which are banned. Moreover, sectarian outfit Sipah-i-Sahaba, which now operates under the ASWJ moniker, has worked under three different names, some banned, others not.

The point is that unless the leaders and members of extremist groups are prosecuted for their crimes — promoting terrorism, inciting violence, hate speech, etc — the state’s attempts to impose bans will not work. The state has banned TLP today, but until those associated with it who have broken the law are prosecuted, it may re-emerge tomorrow in an even more extreme form.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 25, 2025

More than 60 UN members sign cybercrime treaty opposed by rights groups



Delegates pose for photos at the signing ceremony of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime at the National Convention Center in Hanoi on October 25, 2025.

Countries signed their first United Nations (UN) treaty targeting cybercrime in Hanoi, despite opposition from an unlikely band of tech companies and rights groups warning of expanded state surveillance.

The new global legal framework aims to strengthen international cooperation to fight digital crimes, from child pornography to transnational cyberscams and money laundering. More than 60 countries were seen to sign the declaration on Saturday, which means it will go into force once ratified by those states. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described the signing as an “important milestone”, but that it was “only the beginning”.

“Every day, sophisticated scams destroy families, steal migrants and drain billions of dollars from our economy... We need a strong, connected global response,” he said at the opening ceremony in Vietnam’s capital on Saturday. The UN Convention against Cybercrime was first proposed by Russian diplomats in 2017, and approved by consensus last year after lengthy negotiations. Critics say its broad language could lead to abuses of power and enable the cross-border repression of government critics.

“There were multiple concerns raised throughout the negotiation of the treaty around how it actually ends up compelling companies to share data,” said Sabhanaz Rashid Diya, founder of the

Tech Global Institute think tank. “It’s almost rubber-stamping a very problematic practice that has been used against journalists and in authoritarian countries,” she told AFP.

‘Weak’ safeguards

Vietnam’s government said this week that 60 countries were registered for the official signing, without disclosing which ones. But the list will probably not be limited to Russia, China, and their allies. “Cybercrime is a real issue across the world,” Diya said. “I think everybody’s kind of grappling with it.”

The far-reaching online scam industry, for example, has ballooned in Southeast Asia in recent years, with thousands of scammers estimated to be involved and victims worldwide conned out of billions of dollars annually. “Even for the most democratic states, I think they need some degree of access to data that they’re not getting under existing mechanisms,” Diya told AFP.

Democratic countries might describe the UN convention as a “compromise document”, as it contains some human rights provisions, she added. But these safeguards were slammed as “weak” in a letter signed by more than a dozen rights groups and other organisations.

Tech sector

Big technology companies have also raised concerns.

The Cybersecurity Tech Accord delegation to the treaty talks, representing more than 160 firms including Meta, Dell and India’s Infosys, will not be present in Hanoi, its head Nick Ashton-Hart said.

Among other objections, those companies previously warned that the convention could criminalise cybersecurity researchers and “allows states to cooperate on almost any criminal act they choose”.

Potential overreach by authorities poses “serious risks to corporate IT systems relied upon by billions of people every day”, they said during the negotiation process. In contrast, an existing international accord, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, includes guidance on using it in a “rights-respecting” way, Ashton-Hart said. The location for the signing has also raised eyebrows, given Vietnam’s record of crackdowns on dissent.

“Vietnamese authorities typically use laws to censor and silence any online expression of views critical of the country’s political leadership,” said Deborah Brown of Human Rights Watch.

“Russia has been a driving force behind this treaty and will certainly be pleased once it’s signed,” she told AFP.

“But a significant amount of cybercrime globally comes from Russia, and it has never needed a treaty to tackle cybercrime from within its borders,” Brown added.

“This treaty can’t make up Russia’s lack of political will in that regard.”

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 25, 2025

Support the UN for the 21st century

BY MARCUS VINICIUS DE FREITAS



UN headquarters in New York City.

As the United Nations celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2025, it is a moment for both jubilation and clear-eyed reflection. The UN, born from the ashes of global conflict, stands as one of humanity's most ambitious experiments in collective security. Its role in shaping a stable postwar order — fostering dialogue and preserving peace — is a legacy we can all be proud of. The prevention of large-scale conflicts that may lead to another world war stands as a powerful, if silent, testament to its value. We must appreciate and honor these significant achievements, which have shaped the world we live in today.

As Victor Hugo affirmed, "even the darkest night will end, and the sun will rise". Thus, it was from the ruins of World War II that the international organization that would become the main driving force for peace was born. In the auditorium of the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco, California, delegates from 50 nations signed the United Nations Charter on June 26, 1945. It came into force

on Oct 24, 1945, with the goal of avoiding the scourge of war. The winning Allies wanted to create an international collaboration system to maintain collective peace and security. To this end, five countries play key roles in the Security Council — China, France, Russia (formerly the Soviet Union), the United Kingdom, and the United States — to avoid a similar failure to that of the UN's unsuccessful predecessor, the League of Nations.

One of the fundamental guiding principles of the UN is that all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The UN also aims to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion.

For the past 80 years, there is no doubt that the world has breathed more easily thanks to the existence of the UN.

The organization's contributions are legion. Through diplomacy, mediation, and the vital work of its peacekeeping forces, it has repeatedly prevented regional crises from escalating into global conflagrations. In many crisis-ridden countries, UN missions have provided stability and paved the way for reconstruction. Its humanitarian agencies — UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme — have been a lifeline for the most vulnerable. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains a moral compass, while the Sustainable Development Goals continue to rally nations around common aspirations for a better world.

Beyond composition, the very location of the UN's headquarters has become a point of symbolic and practical friction. Placing the world body in New York in 1945 acknowledged the pre-eminence of the US. Eight decades on, this choice presents liabilities. The host nation's tendency to leverage its position — through visa restrictions and political pressure — undermines the principle of universality. This tension has been laid bare during the current US administration, whose open skepticism of multilateralism highlights a concerning divergence between the host country and the institution's founding mission.

Therefore, mere tinkering at the edges will not suffice. The world needs to uphold the UN-centered international order while supporting its bold reform. As the old saying cautions, one cannot put new wine into old wineskins. A structure designed for the 20th century cannot contain the ambitions of the 21st. We must recognize the urgency of this need for bold change and the importance of acting now.

The UN needs to prove a stronger commitment to genuinely inclusive multilateralism, giving nations across Asia, Africa and Latin America a greater sense of ownership. This inclusivity is not just a choice, but a necessity for the UN's future, and a value we should all uphold. It is through inclusivity and legitimacy that the UN can truly serve its purpose in the 21st century.

It would rebalance the UN's legitimacy and imbue it with renewed moral authority for the challenges ahead. The peripheries of 1945 must become the centers of 2025 if the UN is to retain its relevance.

Eighty years on, the UN stands at a crossroads. Its past achievements deserve our respect, but our reverence must not become an obstacle to necessary evolution. To preserve the spirit of San Francisco — the commitment to peace, justice, and collective action — the world must have the courage to embrace bold change. Through expanded representation, deeper inclusivity, and a symbolic rebirth, the UN can reclaim its vital mission for the century to come.

SOURCE: CHINA DAILY, OCTOBER 25, 2025

Weapon displays

IT is commendable that the Punjab government is moving to eliminate illegal weapons from the province. It now remains to be seen how effective and equitable the crackdown proves to be.

The decision, taken during a Friday meeting presided over by the provincial chief executive, entails the introduction of new laws in the province, integrated security measures and the regulation of licensed arms through strict scrutiny of their bearers. Separately, the provincial police chief has announced the Punjab Surrender of Illegal Arms Act, 2025, which is to be implemented in a phased manner.

The first phase will seek the surrender of all illegal weapons, which will then be destroyed in the second phase. Finally, the provincial police force will move to enforce more strictly various arms-related laws. It appears that its recent confrontation with a religio-political party has shaken the Punjab government into action, and it now wishes to reassert the state's monopoly over violence.

This is all well and good, and the initiative must be supported if the intention is to secure peace for the province. At the same time, it must be highlighted that Punjab Police itself has recently been at the centre of a serious controversy involving extrajudicial killings. If the bearing of arms is to be strictly regulated, it follows naturally that those who are allowed to carry deadly weapons should be held to a very strict standard of conduct.

The Punjab government and its police force seem keen to enforce strict standards on civilians, as they should, but what seems missing is any standard for self-accountability, even as the number of deadly police 'encounters' continues to rise. It is here that the Punjab government must demonstrate that the measures being taken to prevent gun violence are meant for everyone's protection. It must hold errant officers to account as well.

That said, the other provinces would do well to also pay attention to the problem. Gun-toting guards have become a sought-after symbol of power in urban areas, especially Karachi, and the rapid proliferation of this practice has made it very difficult to ascertain who bears arms rightfully and who bears them just to intimidate others. Ideally, no display of weapons in public should be allowed at all, but given the country's perennially troubled security environment, armed guards may be necessary in some contexts.

For such cases, apart from extensive checks and scrutiny of arms licences, as well as mandatory psychological examinations of those who seek to bear them, the state must also consider measures like requiring private guards to wear a universally recognisable uniform so that it is easier for the public to feel more at ease among those carrying arms openly. Peaceful citizens should feel safe wherever they go. Much needs to be done to ensure that.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 27, 2025

Unhappy with NCCIA, Punjab to set up its own agency

- **CM Maryam approves the plan to curb misuse of digital platforms**
- **Province cites slow, inadequate response from federal cybercrime agency**

LAHORE: Unhappy with the performance of the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency (NCCIA), the Punjab government has decided in principle to set up its own wing to deal with the rising incidents of cybercrime in the province.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. “The Cybercrime Wing will be established in Punjab to curb the misuse of digital platforms,” the meeting decided.

A senior official told Dawn that Punjab had been facing difficulties as its complaints were not properly addressed by the NCCIA and often took too long to be disposed of.

“Keeping in view the sharp rise in cybercrime in the most-populated province of the country, Punjab feels the need to have a separate wing to deal with the menace,” he said.

After the NCCIA was established in May this year — replacing the Federal Investigation Agency’s (FIA) Cybercrime Wing — the Punjab government tried to develop a “working relationship” with the federal authority, but it did not yield results.

The Punjab government has been facing increasing challenges on social media, particularly the targeting of the Sharif family by political opponents. Even provincial ministers, including Information Minister Azma Bokhari, have filed complaints with the NCCIA against individuals involved in online character assassination.

Ms Bokhari recently announced plans to move the NCCIA against TV anchor Mubasher Lucman under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) for alleged defamation.

Questions, however, are being raised about whether the proposed provincial cybercrime wing is intended to target political rivals.

Meanwhile, the NCCIA itself has been struggling with severe manpower shortages as thousands of complaints pour in each month. With a large backlog and limited resources, the authority has been unable to process cases efficiently.

“In the NCCIA, complaints arrive in thousands every month. Most are related to account hacking, harassment, and financial fraud,” an official told Dawn.

“In harassment cases, many involve the uploading of objectionable photos or videos — often by ex-husbands, ex-fiancés, or boyfriends — to blackmail victims. But the NCCIA lacks the staff and resources needed to handle such a massive volume.”

He said evidence collection also remains a major challenge due to non-cooperation from some social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, and Gmail.

“There is no treaty between the government and these companies, so they are not legally bound to share data with the NCCIA. Only in cases involving life threats or ransom do they respond promptly. Besides, the authority is not equipped with the latest software required to trace and verify digital evidence,” he added.

Over the past few years, the number of cybercrime complaints has increased manifold, but the government has not taken steps to strengthen the capacity of the investigating agency, including training officers in countries that have advanced cybercrime systems.

“The government should build the cybercrime setup on the pattern of the FBI,” the official suggested.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 28, 2025

Libyan boat capsized tragedy: Two human traffickers handed down 20-year RI, Rs1.4m fine each

GUJRAT: A special court of Gujranwala awarded 20-year rigorous imprisonment, along with Rs1.4 million fine each to two human traffickers who had illegally sent a youth to Libya who later went missing in 2023 boat capsized tragedy.

The third accused in the case has already been convicted.

According to the prosecution, case number 203/23 was lodged on June 2, 2023 with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) under sections 3, 6 of the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants of Act (PSMA) 2018, and 17/22 of Emigration Ordinance (EO) 1979, against the three convicts – Nadim Aslam, Muhammad Aslam (also placed on Red Book 2023) and Muhammad Mumtaaz.

The convicts extorted Rs2.3 million from the complainant to send his nephew to Italy for employment via Libya, who later went missing in a boat capsizing incident in 2023.

The FIA's Gujranwala circle had lodged the case and arrested them and submitted the case challan in the court.

On the conclusion of case proceedings, the court handed down 20-year rigorous imprisonment, along with Rs1.4m fine, each to the convicts Nadeem Aslam and Muhammad Aslam after charges were proved against them. The third suspect, Mumtaz, has already been convicted in the same case.

OFFLOADED: FIA Immigration authorities offloaded at least three Tajikistan-bound passengers from a flight at the Sialkot International Airport as they allegedly intended to ultimately reach Italy via Libya through an agent.

An FIA official says the passengers – Sulman Zulfqar, Naeem Khan and Niaz Wali – intended to travel to Tajikistan on tourist visas by flight No FZ315.

During immigration clearance, the three passengers could not justify the purpose of their travel.

On being quizzed by the immigration officials, they revealed that they paid a total sum of Rs10m to an agent to reach Italy through Libya.

The official says that on scrutiny of their WhatsApp data, their intention to ultimately reach Italy via Libya was evident. Hence, the passengers were offloaded and handed over to the FIA's Gujranwala circle for further legal action.

FOUND HANGED: The body of a sweeper, who had gone missing four days ago, was found hanging with a rope in a storeroom on the roof of the Gujranwala district courts building.

Reports say that Sufian, who was employed as a sweeper in the Gujranwala district courts, had gone missing on Thursday the last.

His family lodged a kidnapping complaint with the area police.

However, on Monday, Sufian's body was found hanging with a rope from the ceiling of a storeroom located on the roof of the court building.

On being called, A team of Civil Lines police reached the spot and shifted the body to the district headquarters hospital, where doctors later conducted autopsy.

The body was then handed over the family of the deceased.

A team of Punjab Forensic Science Agency (PFSA) also collected evidence from the scene.

A police team has been constituted to probe the matter.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 28, 2025

Going rogue

WHEN officials of sensitive agencies are accused of breaking the law, the state needs to thoroughly investigate, and ensure that the guilty are punished to restore people's faith in law-enforcement bodies. In this regard, a sorry picture is emerging of alleged wrongdoing within the ranks of the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency. Several of the agency's officers that had gone 'missing' for weeks were reported to be in FIA custody on Monday. At least six of the suspects were presented before a Lahore court yesterday. The personnel, which include several senior officers, are facing serious charges including misuse of authority and extortion. These relate to investigations of well-known YouTubers; they are accused, among other things, of extorting large sums from the YouTubers' families in the name of 'providing relief'.

There are several disturbing aspects to this scandal. Firstly, no matter how serious the charge, no one should be whisked away without due process. The suspects should have been presented in court the day the authorities felt they had credible evidence against them. If people in such powerful positions can go 'missing', what fate awaits lesser mortals accused by the state of wrongdoing? The second issue is that of eroding trust in state institutions. If officers representing an agency charged with cracking down on cybercrime are themselves allegedly involved in criminal rackets, who can the citizen have confidence in? Moreover, questions arise about the fate of the NCCIA, which started operations earlier this year to replace the FIA's Cybercrime Wing. Apparently the Punjab government is also not happy with the NCCIA's performance, and plans to set up its own cybercrime unit. It is hoped this move is being made purely to improve law enforcement, and not to enable the Punjab administration to freely crack down on all its critics. At the same time, it is clear that the nation needs a dedicated unit focusing on cybercrime, considering the high frequency of such crimes in society. If there is sufficient evidence that there was dubious investigation and wrongdoing in the YouTubers' case, other cases pursued by the NCCIA should also be looked at afresh to ensure that no injustice was done. A comprehensive reckoning of the NCCIA is required. The agency needs to be revamped to ensure it is staffed with honest officers who focus on battling cybercrime, not indulging in crime themselves.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 29, 2025

State & religious extremism

ZAHID HUSSAIN

PAKISTAN has banned the TLP again. It is the second time in four years that the violent religious-political group has been outlawed. The action has been taken by the federal government after the group had turned Lahore into a virtual battlefield, destroying public property and attacking law-enforcement agencies. Several people, including policemen, were killed and wounded.

It was the worst incident of violence perpetrated by a religious group in Lahore in recent times. The government says the state will not succumb to any kind of threat or blackmail this time. The crackdown on the group, which has strong mass support in Punjab, has been intensive. But given its past record of appeasement, there are still doubts over the seriousness of the latest government action.

There is also the question of the policy dealing with violent extremism that is now so deeply entrenched in society. The TLP is just a symptom of a menace that threatens our social fabric and the state's unity. The rise of religious extremism in Pakistan is, to a large extent, the result of the state's own policies.

In fact, the TLP is a product of the impunity allowed by the state to extremist ideology. Has there been a genuine shift in state policy towards religious extremism? Just banning the TLP won't solve the problem of religious extremism in the country. There is no indication of the state willing to completely root out violent extremism.

A TLP ban in 2021 lasted for only a few months before the state caved in under pressure of the extremist group. Not only was the ban lifted, the party, which was accused of mutiny and killing policemen, was allowed to participate in the general elections. It emerged as the country's fourth largest party in terms of the number of votes, with its main support in Punjab.

That shows how deeply religious extremism has seeped into the mainstream. A party which was born of a movement in support of the killer of a governor of Punjab, who was accused falsely of blasphemy and murdered in 2011, has turned into a major political force in Pakistan's biggest and most powerful province. It could not have happened without the state allowing it impunity. The group saw a meteoric rise after its infamous dharna in Islamabad in 2017 that left the federal capital paralysed for more than a month over a law passed by parliament.

It is curious that the state appeared helpless before a mob of few hundreds challenging parliament and the government's writ. The dharna ended after the administration accepted their demands. Interestingly, the agreement also had the signature of a senior ISI officer. A Supreme Court observation in the case questioned the role of the intelligence agency in the TLP protest. It became

quite a scandal when a picture of a senior army officer distributing money among the dispersing crowds after the agreement appeared in the media.

Most alarming was the role of the TLP in weaponising the blasphemy law. There has been a marked increase in mob lynchings on false blasphemy accusations. The lynching of a Sri Lankan employee at a garment factory in Sialkot some years ago, the burning to death of a man in Swat, as well as the shooting of a doctor by a police officer in Mirpurkhas are just a few examples of the misuse of blasphemy laws.

There is also question about the Election Commission's decision to not only register a group with a violent record as a political party but to also allow it to contest elections. The decision violated the law. With its more extremist religious ideology, the TLP managed to eat into the vote bank of other moderate mainstream religio-political parties.

Now the government has decided to ban the TLP and delist it as a political party. The reference is being sent to the Supreme Court for its approval, and it could be that the court won't object to the government's action. But there is still the question of whether merely banning the party can tackle the issue of violent religious extremism. The government action against the TLP was in response to the group's violent protests and not because of its extremist ideology and attacks on religious minorities and their places worship, which have become rampant particularly in Punjab. All that has been happening for a long time without any action by the administration against the perpetrators.

Just banning a party will not be effective if the state is not fully committed to enforcing the law against all religious extremist forces. The real issue is not the group but the extremist ideology it espouses. We have many examples of banned outfits resurfacing under different names. That could also happen in the TLP's case.

It is necessary to address the root causes of religious extremism in the country. Support for the TLP and other extremist groups largely come from semi-educated and deprived sections of society, which are easily swayed. It does not mean, however, that other sections are not influenced as well by radical groups.

A country where over 40 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and 25 million children are out of school provides fertile ground for extremist religious groups to mobilise support. Moreover, the TLP and other extremist groups try to legitimise their actions through some faulty provisions in the law. Exploitation of religion for political gains also provides sustenance to extremist groups.

If the state is sincere about eradicating religious extremism, it needs to address socioeconomic issues. The growing population is adding to the ranks of the unemployed in the country, which means it is also providing easily swayed recruits to extremist groups. Our education system itself creates extremist mindsets. Just banning the TLP without addressing these issues is not going to solve the problem of religious extremism.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 29, 2025

Dismantling violent groups

FAISAL ALI RAJA

Violent groups are difficult to dismantle in limited time and resources. The process is often tedious and full of perils leading to their dispersion and emergence of new groups or sub-groups which can pose fresh challenges to state institutions and law enforcement agencies. Here few things need to be kept in mind to reduce social scattering associated with sudden dismantling of violent groups.

The evolution of violent groups, natural or unnatural, plays an important role in their future progression. Sometimes an available void propels a group into prominence. At times some state institutions support them for their immediate or long-term utility while local administration and LEAs think in a different manner. As a result, police and other law enforcers pay a heavy price at the hands of such violent groups.

On the other hand, if a violent group is formed purely on political grounds to create a significant vote bank, then there are chances that its violent streak may be toned down or kept within a permissible limit over a certain period of time. Such groups come to the fore in quick succession and emerge at critical junctures creating public disturbances. As their utility diminishes, they lose their financial means and therefore try to swim in uncharted waters for survival. Their progression towards violence is tempered by abrupt spikes and they can often be termed as hybrid. They are certainly motivated by ideology and use identity or sectarian platform to reach out to public. Their presence brings an exceedingly divisive force among the polity with gradual swelling of their die-hard supporters and voters. Their rational choice to reach out to external elements can irritate state institutions and hence their dismantling becomes a favored choice of action.

All violent groups act like human organisms and get affected by external or internal environment. These groups become more active during expansion of their networks and strengthening of their links at sub-division and district levels. The imbalance between real and apparent objectives of these groups increases their violent streak. As the gulf between the two increases, the primary tier leadership thinks that they need to look towards other avenues to make their survival and relevance intact. Since these groups are evolved through a controlled manner, they find great enthusiasm in exploring new avenues. Their augmentation brings them street power, financial incentives and political gains as well. Suddenly they start deviating from their real goal in a gradual and incremental way.

The hostile agencies also start focusing on them and try to barter local level disturbances in exchange for financial gains as well. As these groups gain power, they push back local administration and LEAs to make their presence felt in every activity. Their devotees also swell with

passage of time and people from different professions join these groups thinking that it may assist them in getting their work done in an effective and speedy manner.

As a violent group gains popularity among the masses, its dismantling becomes complex and problematic. Resultantly, the group may be divided into two or three sub-groups with divergent leadership, thus decreasing its role and power. These factions can dissipate its energy and vote bank as well. A weak leadership may also blunt its violent streak. The most dangerous thing during dismantling is that its members or die-hard supporters may take revenge from individuals at key administrative positions or they can target police and other LEAs indiscriminately.

Such an attitude is typical of young zealots among the rank and file of these groups. They may join hardcore militants operating in the hinterlands or become part of sleeper cells of terror organisations in city districts. The state intelligence set-ups should conduct security audits along with promptly pointing out absent members of the group. There is also an imminent need to conduct psychological profiling of police personnel and members of other LEAs. The more effectively this dispersion is controlled, the more efficiently the surprise attacks by resolute members of violent groups can be reduced. In the end, perpetual vigilance is a serious requirement.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, OCTOBER 29, 2025

Diagnosing organised crime

TARIQ PARVEZ

WHAT may appear as disparate events carried out by separate criminal syndicates are in fact manifestations of the overarching phenomenon of organised crime. For instance, the recent devastating floods in Swat, often attributed to climatic changes alone, were also driven by deforestation at the hands of the timber mafia. Similarly, the Lahore floods this year were caused not only by poor urban planning but also the illegal blocking of the city's natural water courses by influential land grabbers.

In 2023, 350 Pakistanis drowned in a boat incident near Greece while being illegally smuggled into Europe. In another instance, the US INCS report of 2025 says that “mass quantities of drugs transit Pakistan’s maritime domain freely”, thanks to powerful transnational drug mafias. Widespread financial crimes in Pakistan, like money laundering and illicit financial flows, remain largely undiagnosed and undetected, eroding our economy, governance and national security. The US State Department estimates that around \$10 billion is illegally funnelled out of Pakistan each year. This money is either obtained through corruption by public officials or are the proceeds of crime by powerful criminals, and sent abroad without detection.

As stated by Moisés Naím in *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy*, “Organised crime should not be understood as isolated cartels but as pipelines through which illicit goods — drugs, arms, humans, illicit money — flow across borders and jurisdictions, often using the same routes and facilitators”. In Pakistan, sadly, the state has consistently misdiagnosed them as isolated crimes rather than as interconnected criminal enterprises, facilitated by powerful state-embedded actors. Consequently, the pipelines of organised criminal networks stay largely intact, while law-enforcement agencies focus mostly on the arrest of their foot soldiers in sporadic raids. Targeting this wide spectrum of organised crime requires prioritisation according to the extent of harm caused, which requires an accurate diagnosis of the risk, based on data and evidence.

As the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime states, “Data is power in the fight against organised crime”. It follows that unless we plug the existing gaps in data collection and analyses, our diagnosis of organised crime in Pakistan shall continue to be inaccurate. The gaps in the diagnosis of organised crime in the country can be broadly divided into two categories — national and institutional. Since globally organised crime syndicates infiltrate government and political systems, strong political will is needed to combat them. In Pakistan, many cases have been reported in the media about how different types of mafias allegedly exert influence on official policymaking, like the sugar mafia, money laundering cartels etc. A case in point is Khanani & Kalia International, a Karachi-based, money-laundering syndicate, which was involved in worldwide transactions worth billions of dollars annually.

The arrest of its directors by FIA in 2008 and their subsequent acquittal by the court in 2011 indicates how the prosecution of powerful cartels works in Pakistan. There were reports of billions changing hands. Meanwhile, another director at KKI was arrested in the US in 2015 and convicted in 2017 for running a global money-laundering syndicate from Karachi worth billions of dollars annually. KKI was declared a transnational criminal organisation. Thus, the political will to address the challenge is uneven and depends on how politically powerful criminal networks are and what kind of organised crime they are involved in. Political will across the board to address all forms of organised crime is missing. Meanwhile, the institutional response is fragmented. Institutions dealing with various forms of organised crime work in silos. Not only does this hinder the identification of cross-crime networks, it also results in two major gaps in diagnosing organised crime. The first is the lack of a standardised national format for data maintenance by institutions dealing with different forms of organised crime, which impedes a uniform, holistic threat analysis across all institutions. Access to available data is limited, obstructing an objective and independent analysis of the issue.

Second, an essential aspect of diagnosing organised crime networks is accurate identification of corrupt public officials, or in the words of FATF, ‘politically exposed persons’ who may be facilitators of organised crime. The IMF is reported to have shared a draft with the Pakistan government in August 2025, pointing out that our system to identify politically exposed persons is “uneven”, implying that the more powerful you are, the less likely you are to be identified.

A multidimensional effort is needed to improve the diagnosis of organised crime in the country.

One, there is an urgent need to emphasise the gravity of the cross-sectoral impact of organised crime, which is missing in our national discourse. As per the UNODC, “harm caused by organised crime lies in its ability to simultaneously damage economies, weaken governance, fuel corruption, erode security and inflict severe social harm”. If left unchecked, it is likely to continue encroaching upon all segments of society, and as stated by Cornelis Roelofse, it can lead the country into “criminotocracy”, ie, “a system of governance where organised crime, governance and business, use the system for self-enrichment and manipulate the elections to remain in power”.

Two, the recently set-up Anti Money Laundering Authority should have adequate powers to meaningfully coordinate between different powerful stakeholders. For starters, it should draw up, in consultation with all relevant institutions, standardised formats of data maintenance to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive analysis of all forms of organised crimes in Pakistan, the harm these cause and their pipelines. Similarly, the FATF’s 12th recommendation makes it mandatory for all relevant institutions in every country to improve systems to identify politically exposed persons. There is, thus, a need to get our act together before the FATF takes it up as a cause of concern.

The Global Organised Crime Index, 2023, rated Pakistan as a high-risk country with low resilience to deal with organised crime. That should ring alarm bells for course correction. It is for us to decide, whether we opt to identify and rein in these monstrous criminal syndicates, or allow ourselves to turn into a criminotocracy.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 30, 2025

Intricate landscape

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

SINCE the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, militants have been changing strategies and targets. Pakistan's complex terrorism landscape has been significantly shaped by geopolitical shifts, foreign fighters' arrival, foreign forces' exit from Afghanistan, peace pacts, kinetic operations, political instability and changing militant tactics. Before the US left Afghanistan, kinetic operations weakened militant networks. Our terrorism landscape, resurging in tribal border areas, is multifaceted, transnational and an evolving threat. Despite earlier kinetic gains against them, militants have adopted new strategies, alliances and operational capacities.

Global Terrorism Index 2025 listed Pakistan as the second-most terrorism-affected state — 490 attacks in 2023 and 1,099 in 2024 (mainly by TTP and Baloch militant groups). TTP factions impact parts of the north, south and KP's merged districts, with IS-K trying to assert its presence in places. BLA and other militants are active in parts of Balochistan's Baloch belt.

Cross-border linkages reinforce local militants, as seen in the Jaffar Express hijacking and Mastung bus bombing. These must be severed and cross-border sanctuaries eliminated via all options, including diplomatic. The criminal-terrorist nexus benefits militants. Challenges include stopping infiltration from Afghanistan and persuading Kabul to fulfil CT commitments and reduce support to militants. Better border security and intel-sharing need joint efforts. Pakistan must invest more in counter-radicalisation and education reform and keep telling Afghanistan to act against militants on its soil.

Changed tactics include ambushes on security convoys and LEA posts. Militants prolong attacks, testing LEAs' patience. Reduced suicide and increased IED attacks show they want suicide bombers in their stock. LEA killings aim to demoralise LEAs and erode public confidence. Greater online radicalisation makes militants' task easier. Increased threats enhance foreign-funded connectivity projects' vulnerability, with provinces creating special security units.

Handling sympathisers needs counter-narratives and community engagement. Of the total 82 banned groups, some 21 are sectarian and 21 ethnic-based violent ones needing non-kinetic efforts. Tackling urban sleeper cells needs technology, legal instruments, administrative steps and effective LGs. Due to cross-border havens and attacks, CT action only in Pakistan may not work; Afghanistan must take action, too, against those using its soil to attack Pakistan. Does it have the will and capacity for this? Coordination gaps in the criminal justice system help militants. To improve conviction rates and swiftly dispose of cases, military courts were created through the 21st and 23rd amendments. But the ATC reform aim wasn't fulfilled. NAP's point 20 and the revised NAP's point 12 prioritise CJS reform — political manifestation, consensus, finances, curriculum changes in CJS training, community engagement and technology.

There were 20 and 26 attacks in 2023 and 2024, during polio vaccination drives, reflecting militants' aim to show low community acceptance of the vaccine, especially in tribal areas. Militants exploit anti-vaccine sentiments bolstered by some clerics to justify attacks. In KP, with better community outreach and improved security, there was no loss of vaccinators or LEAs in three drives this year. The dark web deepens extremist mindsets. Militants use social media and encrypted messaging apps to recruit, radicalise and communicate, and use AI for propaganda. Provincial LEAs must police cyberspace and be given the legal mandate.

In summer, militants move easily, regroup and attack rural and tribal areas. Winter reduces this activity in high-altitude areas, so they shift to warmer lowlands, increasing urban terrorism risks like extortion and kidnapping. Factoring the weather in CT action, LEAs can ensure better use of resources and effective responses.

Use of the latest arms and drones shows foreign support for militants. Countering this requires legal, administrative steps, training and latest gadgets for LEAs. The current resurgence must be met with a multidimensional strategy to refute extremist ideas, improve intel, police capacity, border control and synchronise external and internal policies, besides regional cooperation, political consensus and military and ideological strategies.

During the ongoing phase, clarity of policy on responding to cross-border terrorism, offensive strategy against militants in the merged areas, and dealing with sectarian violence and disorder can hopefully yield dividends. A charter of peace by all political parties based on provincial action plans, with federal CT agencies taking the lead, is needed.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 30, 2025

Militants suffered highest number of losses in 10 years in October



Pakistan Army soldiers stand guard at the Red Zone area, ahead of the arrival of Chinese Premier Li Qiang for a four-day bilateral visit and a heads-of-government gathering of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in Islamabad, Pakistan on October 14, 2024.

Militants in Pakistan suffered their heaviest losses in ten years during the month of October as security forces intensified counter-militancy operations across multiple regions, according to data compiled by an Islamabad-based think tank.

This comes after militants were put on the back foot in September, with 69 attacks recorded and a 52 per cent decline compared to the month of August, as per the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

In its latest monthly report issued today, PICSS stated that 355 militants were eliminated in October, while 72 security personnel and 31 civilians, including a peace committee member in Bannu, lost their lives.

Another 92 security personnel, 48 civilians and 22 militants were injured across the country, the PICSS Militancy Database showed.

While the think tank recorded a 29pc rise in militant attacks from 69 in September to 89 in October, overall human losses in these attacks declined by 19pc.

The report highlighted that militants kidnapped 55 people last month, the highest monthly figure of abductions in a decade. Security forces also arrested 22 suspected militants.

The report detailed that 55 security personnel, 29 civilians and the peace committee member, along with 24 militants, were killed in militant-initiated violence.

These attacks also left 88 security personnel, 45 civilians and one militant injured.

PICSS noted that while Balochistan witnessed 23 militant attacks in October compared to 21 in September, casualties dropped sharply from 33 security personnel and 38 civilians to 16 security men and three civilians. The number of militants killed remained eight for both months.

The number of security personnel left injured fell from 37 in September to 15 in October, and that of civilians declined from 85 to 20, while a militant was also wounded.

However, 31 people, mostly labourers, were kidnapped by militants during the month, the PICSS report added.

Detailing casualties from counterterrorism operations, PICSS said security forces killed 67 militants — the highest monthly militant death toll in Balochistan since 2002, when the current wave of militancy began.

PICSS described this as a notable improvement in the province's security situation, pointing to a 92pc decline in civilian deaths and a 52pc drop in security personnel fatalities.

In the tribal belt (erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas), 22 militant attacks were recorded — the same as in September — but casualties increased significantly.

Thirty-one people, including 18 security personnel and 13 civilians, were killed, while 32 security personnel and 13 civilians were among 45 wounded. Militants also kidnapped 18 people from the region.

PICSS noted a 200pc rise in security personnel deaths, up from six to 18, and a 48pc overall rise in fatalities, including those of militants.

Security operations in the tribal areas killed 209 militants — the highest single-month militant death toll since November 2014.

Sixteen security personnel were also killed in these operations, including during the deadliest incident in Orakzai district, which led to border tensions with Afghanistan.

The institute confirmed that security forces also eliminated Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) former deputy emir and shadow defence minister, Qari Amjad, in Bajaur — the most high-profile TTP death since the group's inception in 2007.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa saw 37 militant attacks in October compared to 25 in September, resulting in 48 deaths — 21 security personnel, 10 civilians, 16 militants and one peace committee member.

Forty-two people were injured, including 35 security personnel and seven civilians. Four people were kidnapped by militants. Security operations killed 55 militants, while a security personnel lost his life.

PICSS data shows militant deaths in operations dropped from 88 in September to 55 in October.

In Sindh, three militant attacks killed three civilians and injured seven people, including four civilians and three security personnel.

PICSS reported increased activity of the proscribed Zainabiyoun Brigade, with eight suspected militants, including key commanders, arrested.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) targeted the Jaffar Express in Sindh's Shikarpur district with an improvised explosive device (IED), derailing four bogies and injuring seven passengers.

Gilgit-Baltistan witnessed three attacks, including two attempted target killings apparently by Zainabiyoun Brigade, while the TTP abducted two officials of the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda).

In Punjab, one low-intensity attack occurred when TTP militants blew up a gas pipeline in Mianwali district. Security forces also arrested an Al-Qaeda operative from the Okara district.

Cumulatively, PICSS recorded 2,853 deaths in the first ten months of 2025 — including 1,734 militants, 601 security personnel, 497 civilians and 21 pro-government combatants.

The institute concluded that while militant violence persists, the sharp rise in militant deaths underscores the growing effectiveness of Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations.

In March, Pakistan ranked second in the Global Terrorism Index 2025, with the number of deaths in terrorist attacks rising by 45pc to 1,081 over the previous year.

SOURCE: DAWN, NOVEMBER 1, 2025