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Director's Message

Here is CGR's first monthly Digest for 2026. Our team of committed professionals and researchers are determined to make a difference in our advocacy and research roles to highlight key challenges facing Pakistan in respect of organized crime and poor governance.

We continue to lead the effort of the civil society in collaborating with the state stakeholders, including the National Focal Person on UNTOC Review Mechanism Process through the Civil Society Alliance of 35 NGOs and CSOs dealing with TOC.

We are also playing an active role in the Asia Regional Civil Society Network launched in Malaysia in January 2025, with 11 countries of South and Southeast Asia comprising more than 40 NGOs. The UNODC Civil Society Unit in Vienna is our active facilitator in this global initiative.

A team of CGR and CFHR professionals and researchers are assisting the UNODC Country Office Islamabad and Vienna in assisting the Government of Pakistan in putting together a National Strategy against Organized Crime in Pakistan.

CGR plays an active role at the global level as Member of Vienna-based Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and participated in Constructive Dialogues on TOC issues.

We plan to participate in the World Frauds Summit in Vienna on 16-17 March 2026.

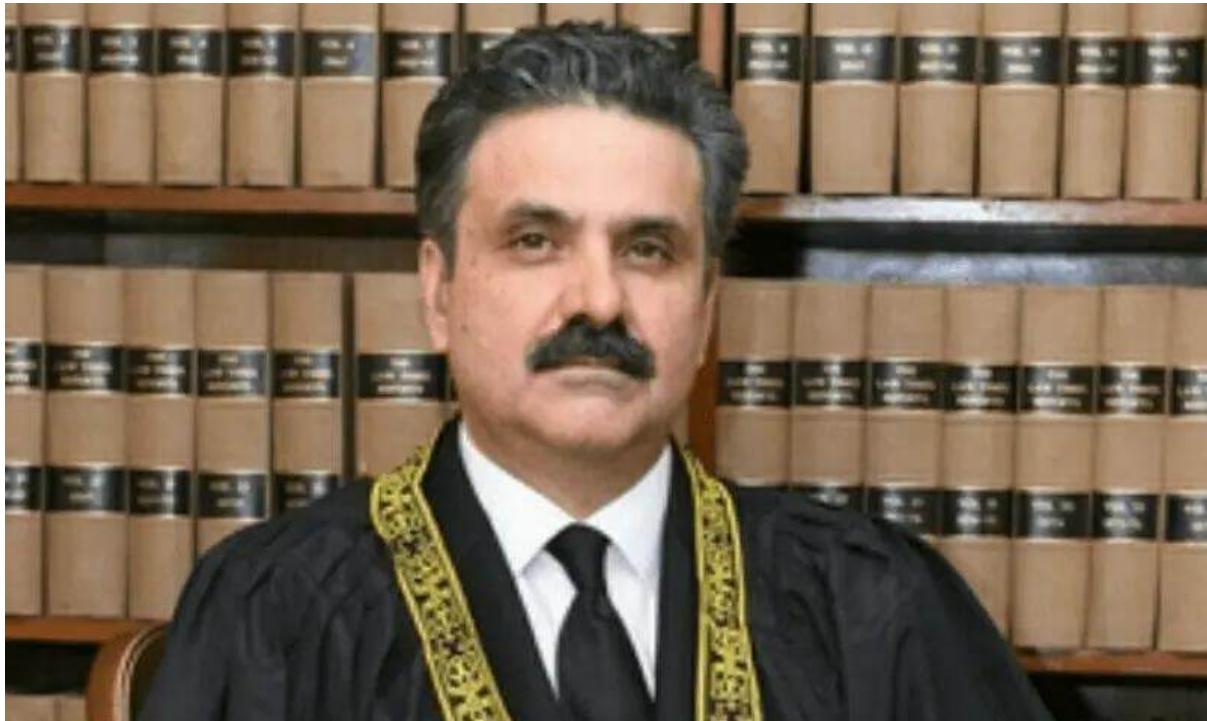
We will also be participating in the Crime Congress in Abu Dhabi on 25-30 April 2026.

All in all, it is going to be a busy year ahead.

Tariq Khosa

Director CGR

CJP Afridi says judiciary to pursue 'meaningful reforms' in 2026 to improve accessibility, strengthen transparency



In his New Year's message, Supreme Court Chief Justice Yahya Afridi said that the judiciary will "pursue meaningful reforms" in 2026 in a bid to improve accessibility, reduce delay and strengthen transparency in the justice system.

In a message posted on the Supreme Court's website, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Afridi conveyed his greetings to the people, members of the judiciary and the legal fraternity on the new year.

"In the coming year, the judiciary will pursue meaningful reforms aimed at improving accessibility, reducing delay, strengthening transparency, and responsibly leveraging technology in the service of justice," he said.

He said that the efforts would be guided by "a clear focus on outcomes that matter most to the public: timely decisions, understandable processes, and courts that are approachable and humane".

CJP Afridi maintained that it was the judiciary's responsibility to "ensure that justice is not only done, but is seen to be done fairly, impartially, and without delay".

“This responsibility acquires deeper meaning when viewed through the lived experience of ordinary citizens who approach our courts with hope, vulnerability, and trust,” the CJP said.

He underscored that the new year called on the judiciary “to reflect, to reform, and to renew our commitment to a justice system that places the citizen at its very centre”.

He asserted that “justice must be accessible in practice, not merely in principle; dignified in process, not just in outcome; and responsive to the needs of women, children, the marginalised, and those living in remote and underserved regions”.

The CJP expressed confidence that “through collective resolve, professionalism, and integrity, the judiciary will continue to strengthen public trust and uphold the ideals enshrined in our Constitution”.

He reaffirmed the “judiciary’s unwavering commitment to serve every citizen with fairness, independence, and compassion”.

CJP Afridi hoped that the new year would “bring renewed confidence in the rule of law and a justice system that truly reaches every doorstep.”

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 01, 2026

'Media faced extreme punitive actions in 2025'



A hawker sorts out newspapers as he sells them along a street in Karachi, Pakistan.

KARACHI: The Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) raised serious concerns over the state of media freedom in the country, saying that journalists and media organisations faced extreme pressure, censorship and punitive actions throughout 2025 despite tight state control over information.

According to CPNE's annual Media Freedom Report 2025, released by its Press Freedom and Monitoring Committee on Wednesday, journalists continued to face killings, arrests, treason cases, harassment and economic pressure between January 1 and December 31, 2025. The report said that blocking of bank accounts, cancellation of national identity cards, inclusion of names in the Exit Control List (ECL) and suspension of government advertisements were widely used to silence critical voices.

The report referred to growing uniformity in print and electronic media content, which has raised serious questions about the independence of journalism in Pakistan. As a result, it said, Pakistan's global ranking on media freedom had further declined. In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Pakistan fell six places to 158th position, compared to 152nd in 2024.

The CPNE said that strict government policies, misuse of the PECA law, controlled advertising policies, press advice and censorship forced many newspapers to shut down.

Newsrooms of major media groups had become largely empty due to downsizing and layoffs. Despite this, journalists continued to face violence and legal action. Several well-known TV anchors, including Kashif Abbasi, Habib Akram, Paras Jahanzaib, Samina Pasha, Sami Ibrahim, Arif Hameed Bhatti and Khalid Jamil were taken off air or compelled to leave their jobs, said the report.

The report also mentioned the Dawn Media Group, which lost government advertisements across print, electronic and radio platforms due to its independent editorial policy, while Jang, Awaaz and Waqt groups also faced severe pressure, leading to staff cuts.

During 2025, the CPNE said five journalists were killed, six faced cases or arrests, three were harassed, two press conferences were stopped, two media offices were attacked, and two major digital restrictions were imposed. One controversial legislation also severely affected freedom of expression, it said.

The CPNE expressed particular concern over the situation in Balochistan, where unofficial censorship, news blackouts and long internet shutdowns have badly damaged print media, pushing many newspapers close to closure. The report condemned all violations and urged federal and provincial governments to end violence and illegal actions against journalists, review restrictive laws and ensure freedom of expression in line with the Constitution and international democratic standards.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 1, 2026

Country witnessed 34pc increase in terrorism in 2025



- **Pak Institute for Peace Studies report counts 699 terrorist attacks in outgoing year**
- **Burden of violence fell on security personnel, constituting over 42pc of fatalities**

ISLAMABAD: Despite record militant deaths, Pakistan saw a sharp escalation in militant violence in 2025, with terrorist attacks rising by 34 per cent and terrorism-related fatalities increasing by 21 per cent year on year. As many as 699 terrorist attacks were recorded countrywide during the year.

This violence claimed at least 1,034 lives and left 1,366 injured, underscoring a rising trajectory of militancy that has persisted since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

These are the findings of the "Pakistan Security Report 2025," released by the Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS).

Besides rising border violence and militant resurgence, evolving militant tactics from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Balochistan fuel a widening security challenge, the report says. The burden of this violence fell disproportionately on the state's defenders as security and law-enforcement personnel suffered over 42pc of all terrorism-related fatalities, with 437 lives lost, the data shows.

The report notes that this stark figure highlights the frontline nature of the conflict and the relentless targeting of army, police and paramilitary forces. Civilians were also heavily affected, with 354 non-combatants losing their lives.

Meanwhile, 243 militants were killed, either in suicide attacks they carried out or during retaliatory fire by security forces following some of the terrorist attacks. The PIPS report says that the conflict remained intensely regionalised, with over 95pc of attacks concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan.

In KP, a 40pc rise in incidents illustrated the entrenched presence of groups like the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates. The province experienced the highest number of terrorist incidents in the country in 2025, with 413 attacks. These violent incidents claimed a total of 581 lives and left 698 others injured.

The province faced not just more frequent attacks, but more complex ones, including a coordinated wave of assaults across 11 districts on Independence Day — a symbolic challenge to state authority, the report says. In Balochistan, the insurgency evolved qualitatively. The province experienced 254 militant attacks in 2025, resulting in 419 deaths and injuries to 607 others. A 26pc increase in attacks was accompanied by a shift towards high-impact, coordinated operations.

Militant groups like the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) moved beyond hit-and-run tactics to execute highway blockades, sieges, and hijackings, directly targeting economic infrastructure and state symbols to amplify their political message and disrupt governance.

Sindh province recorded 21 terrorist attacks, including 16 in Karachi, two in Shikarpur, and one each in Hyderabad, Jacobabad, and Jamshoro. These incidents resulted in 14 fatalities and left 17 others injured. Punjab witnessed seven terrorist attacks in 2025, a decline from 11 incidents in the previous year.

These attacks killed five people including four militants and one policeman, and injured two policemen. A suicide blast outside the judicial complex housing the Islamabad district and sessions courts killed 12 people. Jamaatul Ahrar, a faction of the banned TTP, claimed the attack.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, three attacks were reported, including two in Diamir district and one in Gilgit. These incidents claimed the lives of three security personnel, including two Scouts and one Frontier Corps official, and injured six others.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 2, 2026

Govt orders crackdown on money launderers



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi ordered a comprehensive crackdown against the money-laundering mafia, directing authorities to take firm action against major offenders.

Naqvi issued the directives during a visit to the FIA Karachi Zone, where he chaired a special meeting and reviewed the performance of the Karachi and South zones.

The interior minister ordered a comprehensive crackdown against the money-laundering mafia and directed that major money launderers be dealt with firmly.

He instructed the authorities to fully expose the money trail of those involved in money laundering, warning that the hawala-hundi business would not be tolerated under any circumstances and that visible, indiscriminate action must be ensured.

The interior minister also ordered effective action against agent mafias involved in human smuggling. He said elements who deceive innocent people with false promises of employment abroad deserve no leniency. "Action against the agents' mafia must be taken without any pressure."

Naqvi further stated that those involved in the business of counterfeit medicines were playing with human lives and that such elements engaged in this heinous trade must be brought to justice.

He said the shortage of human resources in the FIA Karachi Zone would be addressed on a priority basis. FIA officers will be provided with all necessary resources; however, they must enhance the institution's reputation through their performance, he added.

The participants of the meeting were told that over the past four months, 20 human smugglers had been arrested and non-custom-paid goods and drugs worth Rs140 million seized.

A Facilitation Center has also been established at Karachi Airport for the convenience of passengers.

The minister sought performance reports from in-charge officers regarding their respective circles and directed them to work with greater diligence.

The FIA Karachi Zone director briefed the interior minister. The meeting was attended by FIA South Additional Director General Mujahid Akbar Khan and other senior officials.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JANUARY 5, 2026

PKCERT, Kaspersky sign MoU to strengthen cybersecurity in Pakistan



PKCERT Director General Dr Haider Abbas and Kaspersky's General Manager for the Middle East and Pakistan Rashed Al Momani exchange an MoU on cybersecurity in the presence of Kaspersky CEO Eugene Kaspersky and IT Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja, on January 5.

The Pakistan Computer Emergency Response Team (PKCERT) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with global cybersecurity company Kaspersky to enhance cybersecurity in Pakistan through collaboration.

PKCERT is a federal government entity responsible for protecting Pakistan's digital assets, sensitive information, and critical infrastructure from cyberattacks, cyberterrorism, and cyber espionage.

A joint press release issued on Monday said that the agreement marked a major step toward enhancing Pakistan's national cybersecurity posture through collaboration in threat detection, mitigation, and prevention.

"The partnership between PKCERT and Kaspersky focuses on strengthening the country's cyber resilience through a series of coordinated efforts. These include extensive training and awareness programs designed to enhance operational readiness across all levels of government, industry, academia, and civil society," the statement said.

It added that the collaboration also focused on capacity development to cultivate a skilled cybersecurity workforce aligned with both national and international standards.

“Additionally, the two organisations will ensure the timely dissemination of actionable cyber threat intelligence to relevant stakeholders across Pakistan,” it said.

Under the MoU, the statement added, the organisations will cooperate across a wide range of cybersecurity areas, “including legislative and regulatory issues, incident detection and response, prevention and mitigation strategies, cybersecurity education, research and development, and professional exchanges”.

“The two organisations will exchange relevant technical information, threat intelligence, and data feeds related to cyber threats and cyberattacks affecting citizens, businesses, and government institutions in Pakistan,” it said.

According to the press release, the MoU was signed by Dr Haider Abbas, the director general of PKCERT, and Rashed Al Momani, general manager for the Middle East and Pakistan at Kaspersky. It was signed in the presence of Kaspersky CEO Eugene Kaspersky and IT Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

“Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a vital role in socio-economic development of a country; however, they have also introduced new challenges such as cyber espionage, hacktivism, ransomware, data breaches, identity theft, attacks on critical infrastructure, financial and supply chain disruptions, and disinformation campaigns,” the statement quoted Abbas as saying.

“Our collaboration with Kaspersky, a global leader with expertise in these domains, represents another important step toward strengthening national cybersecurity,” he added.

“Safeguarding digital development requires robust cybersecurity, founded on deep and continuous partnerships between public authorities and private companies. Kaspersky has a long and fruitful history of working with global and regional organisations such as Interpol and Afripol, as well as local computer emergency response teams around the world,” Al Momani said.

“We highly value this cooperation with PKCERT as an important step in consolidating Pakistan’s secure digital transformation for the entire nation,” he added.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 5, 2026

A national agenda for 2026

MALEEHA LODHI

THE start of the new year is an apt time to look ahead at the overlapping challenges the country faces, identify the core ones and consider what should be done. Needed is a national agenda on which to build a political consensus to help position the country on a sustainable path to durable political and economic stability.

The first order of business should be to establish a calm and peaceful political environment by a truce between the government and opposition. A divided and polarised nation cannot be a stable country. Hard as it may be, given the lack of trust, political parties and other stakeholders should try to de-escalate unending tensions and confrontation that create so much uncertainty and disruption in the country.

PTI seems willing for a dialogue with a government it has never recognised as legitimate. This creates an opportunity that may not last long. PPP leader Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's recent statement calling for "political reconciliation" is a positive move that should be taken forward.

The government has offered talks from time to time but never shown enough seriousness. It has usually accompanied such 'overtures' with rhetoric that demonises the opposition. Moreover, the way it has used parliament as a rubber stamp, bulldozed constitutional amendments through the legislature to undermine an independent judiciary and cracked down on opposition and dissent has laid bare its disregard rather than respect for democracy.

Of course, the elephant in the room is the establishment, which seems unreconciled to the idea of an accommodation between the government and opposition. It would much rather have the government keep the opposition off balance and under unrelenting pressure. Recent statements and pressers by the military spokesman taking aim at PTI have been harder-hitting than in the past. This doesn't suggest softening in the establishment's stance on encouraging a government-opposition modus vivendi.

The opposition represents a large section of society and enjoys significant electoral support across the country. Actions to exclude it from the political process and repress it do nothing to create political stability. Unilateral rule not only erodes democracy but also undermines effective governance. The country's federal nature makes it imperative to operate the political system in an inclusive way, not least because the centre has to work with and not against opposition-run provinces.

Obviously, economic revival must be on top of the national agenda. While the government has done a reasonable job at macroeconomic stabilisation with the help of an IMF bailout and other external resources, this is a short-term gain and rests on unsustainable factors (borrowing and loan rollovers from friendly countries). The debt burden is high and foreign exchange reserves low in the face of heavy external financing needs ahead (around \$23 billion

over the next five years). Meaningful reforms to address the economy's structural problems in the taxation system, expenditure outlays and energy sector are still not in place. The privatisation of PIA is a positive development but there is a long way to go to privatise other loss-making state-owned enterprises that are such a financial drain on the exchequer.

There is as yet no credible plan to help Pakistan break out of the trap of anaemic growth, low savings and investment, high deficits, heavy borrowing and growing indebtedness. Investment, including FDI, remains stagnant. It is widely agreed that Pakistan's growth model isn't working. Short-lived growth booms predicated on domestic and foreign borrowing are unviable. Unless this dysfunctional economic strategy changes the transition from stabilisation to growth and investment will not happen. The various stakeholders should put their heads together to frame an economic plan to tackle, not postpone structural problems and evolve a new growth model. An honest diagnosis about why economic growth has been anaemic for four decades is essential.

Investment in human development should receive high priority in the national agenda. But it doesn't, despite the fact that the country's growth and development prospects are severely constrained by lack of investment in human capital. In fact, the country today is in the throes of a human development crisis. This is reflected in deterioration in recent years in almost all indicators of literacy, education, health, poverty, gender disparity and other aspects of human welfare. That over 20 million children still have no access to school is a national scandal. The government has twice declared an education emergency but then taken no action. Literacy is stagnant at 60 per cent, which means 40pc of our population is illiterate. Economic progress cannot be achieved with this level of illiteracy.

The scale of poverty is also alarming. It has risen to 44pc according to the World Bank. Health indicators are equally disturbing with health outcomes some of the worst in South Asia. A disturbing phenomenon and consequence of malnutrition and poverty is child stunting. According to a WB report, around 40pc of Pakistani children under five are stunted — a shocking number.

The uncontrolled rise in population and lack of government attention to this consequential issue are feeding into and exacerbating Pakistan's crisis in human development. Population growth at around 2.5pc annually means roughly six million children are added to the population every year. This has far-reaching social and economic consequences. These numbers far exceed our resources and are putting enormous strain on the country's physical infrastructure, job markets and health and education facilities at a time when the economy is not growing.

Population planning policies are urgently needed. Pakistan's regional peers have almost all successfully implemented family planning policies. Pakistan hasn't. Unless the country implements a comprehensive population control policy, whose elements are well-known, a demographic disaster awaits the country. An uneducated and underemployed population boom amidst a youth bulge without adequate opportunities being available is a recipe for social and political instability.

Addressing the security challenge from militancy and terrorism should obviously have urgent priority. Militant violence escalated last year with terrorism-related fatalities reaching a decade high. A comprehensive, whole-of-nation approach is needed in which sole reliance is not placed on kinetic actions but that also involves socioeconomic and political measures well as local community support.

These challenges present a test of leadership for all political stakeholders. Can they rise above their narrow interests to deal purposefully with issues that will determine the country's fate and fortunes?

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 5, 2026

A high-stakes digital turn

MOHIUDDIN AAZIM



The promise of digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI) for Pakistan is unmistakable: a path to modernised governance, efficient services, and new economic frontiers. Yet as the country accelerates its digital transformation, 2026 is shaping up to be a decisive year in which policy visions must confront hard operational realities.

A dual pressure an epidemic of financial scams and a new wave of mandatory cybersecurity regulations is forcing a hard turn from aspiration to implementation.

The scale of digital risk is no longer theoretical. According to the Global State of Scams Report 2025, Pakistan loses an estimated \$9 billion annually to financial and digital scams, a figure equivalent to roughly 2.5 per cent of GDP and larger than the value of the recent \$7 billion IMF loan programme. This “silent economic haemorrhage” stems from increasingly sophisticated fraud that exploits digital payment systems, social media, and telecom networks.

Fraudsters are using AI-polished phishing, fake investment platforms and scams impersonating banks, couriers and service providers, exacting a heavy toll on citizens and businesses alike. Some reports of mega frauds find space in the main daily newspapers, but details of many other incidents keep circulating on social media.

Authorities have responded, launching major crackdowns such as Operation Grey, which led to hundreds of arrests, including foreign nationals. The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) led this operation, with support from the Federal Investigation Authority and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.

But these efforts also underscore a critical vulnerability: rapid digital adoption has far outpaced the development of robust cyber governance and public awareness.

In direct response to the accelerating pace of digitisation and AI adoption, Pakistan's regulatory landscape is undergoing its most significant transformation to date. The year 2026 marks a clear shift away from voluntary or advisory frameworks toward mandatory, legally enforceable requirements. For businesses operating across sectors, regulatory compliance is no longer a matter of best practice or reputational comfort; it is rapidly becoming a basic condition for continued operation and market access.

A central pillar of this shift is the introduction of the Pakistan Security Standards (PSS), which mandate compulsory adoption across all public and private sector information technology and cryptographic systems. Full compliance is required by June 1, 2028 (for defence-sector entities, the deadline was December 31, 2025). The implications for industry are substantial: future hardware and software procurement must explicitly specify PSS-compliant products and systems, and non-compliance risks operational disruption, regulatory sanctions and exclusion from government contracts.

Alongside the PSS, regulators are rolling out increasingly stringent sector-specific requirements. The State Bank of Pakistan's Technology Risk Management frameworks now demand demonstrable technical and governance controls, formal board-level oversight of cyber risk, and integration of cyber resilience into overall operational resilience planning. These measures reflect a clear expectation that cyber risk be treated as a core enterprise risk, not a purely technical concern.

The telecommunications sector is also facing far-reaching change under the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority's CTDISR-2025 framework, which mandates data localisation, 24-hour reporting of cybersecurity incidents, clear accountability through designated chief information security officers, and a move toward Zero Trust architectures.

Meanwhile, the anticipated Personal Data Protection Bill once enacted is expected to introduce strict data localisation rules and a 72-hour breach notification mandate, further raising the compliance bar for organisations that collect, process or store personal data within Pakistan.

As is evident from the above discussion, Pakistan has begun laying a strategic foundation for its digital future. The cabinet-approved National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025 sets ambitious targets, including training one million people in AI-related skills, establishing national Centres of Excellence, and creating a dedicated National AI Fund. The policy signals intent, but its success will depend on execution and alignment with ground realities.

Early pilot projects already demonstrate how AI can address longstanding development gaps. In taxation, machine-learning models using satellite imagery are being deployed in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab to identify previously unassessed properties and expand the tax base.

In environmental governance, AI-driven dashboards enable real-time smog monitoring and enforcement actions in Punjab. Urban planners in Lahore are using telecom data and AI analytics to map informal economic activity and migration patterns, offering insights that were previously invisible to policymakers.

Policymakers must accelerate institutional readiness. The establishment of a National Cybersecurity Authority should be fast-tracked to serve as a central coordinating body, while the National AI Council must prioritise “AI for development,” linking initiatives directly to measurable outcomes such as improved tax compliance, environmental enforcement and climate adaptation.

The public and media also have a critical role to play. Awareness campaigns must evolve from general warnings to practical education, helping citizens recognise AI-generated scams, phishing attempts and the importance of basic safeguards such as multi-factor authentication. Pakistan’s digital ambition cannot be separated from its digital security. The promise of AI and digitisation is real, but it rests on systems that are trusted, resilient and enforceable. As the National AI Conference approaches in early 2026, the national conversation must focus on this integration harnessing innovation not just for growth but for secure and sustainable growth.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 5, 2026

Pakistan worst-hit by Taliban takeover of Kabul: International Crisis Group



General view of the Pakistan's flag and the Taliban's flag in the background as seen from the Friendship Gate crossing point in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border town of Chaman.

ISLAMABAD: The International Crisis Group (ICG) says Pakistan is the worst-affected country by the Taliban's 2021 takeover of Afghanistan, noting that even though a ceasefire holds for now, Islamabad is likely to strike again if militant violence persists.

The Brussels-based independent and non-profit think tank, founded by prominent statesmen, says in a new report that relations between the two countries have tanked, mainly because of the Afghan Taliban's refusal to crack down on the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Since 2022, violence in Pakistan has spiralled. In 2025 alone, militants killed more than 600 Pakistani soldiers and police, mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the two provinces bordering Afghanistan.

Islamabad blames the banned TTP for these attacks, along with Baloch insurgent groups, which it believes with evidence, are backed by arch-rival India.

"UN monitors assert that the TTP enjoys Taliban support, but the Taliban publicly deny that Pakistani militants are even in Afghanistan and say Islamabad provoked what they paint as homegrown violence," according to the report.

On its western flank, after 11 Pakistani military personnel were martyred in a TTP attack on Oct 8, Islamabad conducted cross-border airstrikes, including its first-ever strike on Kabul, ostensibly targeting TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud.

Afghanistan retaliated with attacks on Pakistani military installations. Continued fighting claimed military and civilian lives on both sides.

The report cautions that Islamabad is likely to lash out again if it traces another strike back to Afghanistan.

The Taliban regime is badly outgunned, but its retaliation could still be lethal. Kabul claims to have missiles that can reach Pakistani cities, the use of which would likely provoke an even stronger Pakistani response.

South Asia

In South Asia, however, Islamabad's foreign relations are far more fraught. After short wars in 2025 with both Afghanistan and India, another major attack by militants could upend the precarious calm that prevails between Pakistan and its two neighbours.

The report lists 10 conflicts to watch in 2026: Afghanistan-Pakistan, Myan-mar, Israel and the United States versus Iran, Israel-Palestine, Syria, Ukraine, Mali and Burkina Faso, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan, and Venezuela. The report says the world was careening into a dangerous new era well before Donald Trump's return to the White House. Thus far, his second term has done less to slow things down than to put a foot on the gas. The year 2025 was a bloody one, and 2026 promises little better.

'Trump effect'

Less predictable has been President Trump, whose first year back in the White House has turned world politics and international crisis management on their heads. Trump returned to power pledging to bring peace to a world ablaze. He has put himself centre stage in many wars and trouble spots.

Trump has brought fresh attention to peacemaking after years in which diplomatic efforts to end conflicts had been flailing. But Trump has not calmed the global turmoil he decried on the campaign trail. In some cases, he has made it worse.

His deals, often built on other countries' diplomacy, have brought respite to some battlefields but delivered no lasting peace anywhere. Trump's deal-making aims to bring US power to bear, whether in Gaza, by leveraging Israel's dependency on Washington, or elsewhere, mostly by threatening tariffs or dangling business opportunities.

Trump's bargaining must be set against the dearth of peace deals that preceded his return to power as well as the lack of progress in places where he does not engage. European leaders, for example, focused on the existential peril they see on their doorstep, have less bandwidth for peacemaking elsewhere, the report says.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 9, 2026

Police-levies merger

THE Balochistan government's decision to formally merge the over century-old levies force into the Balochistan Police and abolish the distinction between 'A' and 'B' areas represents a paradigm shift in its approach to the administration of law and order for improving security across the province. By placing all territories under police jurisdiction, the government has ended an arrangement rooted in colonial-era governance to better address crime and the province's present-day security challenges. The move is expected to resolve long-standing administrative ambiguity, end uneven and discretion-based enforcement of the law, and equip the province for better policing and counterterrorism under a uniform police command structure. While levies personnel are often recognised for their local knowledge and community ties, the force, which controlled nearly 90pc of the province's territory, was ill-equipped to combat modern organised crime, militancy and the crime-terror nexus. Moreover, they were frequently accused of operating at the behest of their tribal chiefs, undermining their role as impartial law enforcers. Thus, the move will both improve the state's writ and ensure accountability.

That said, the decision may trigger criticism from the beneficiaries of Balochistan's fragmented policing, as well as those who genuinely believe that the province's unique sociopolitical and geographic realities demand a localised, community-based policing structure as provided under the levies force operating under the district administration. This is not the first time that the levies have been merged with police. In 2002, under Gen Pervez Musharraf, the levies were disbanded, its personnel merged with police and the entire province declared an 'A' area under police control. Yet the security situation did not improve, leading to the reversal of the move in 2010. At the end of the day, the police-levies merger signifies the rationale that centralisation and institutional consolidation of the provincial law-enforcement agencies will deliver the desired results and strengthen state authority in Balochistan. However, if this move is to succeed — the province has been grappling with terrorist violence for over two decades — the authorities would have to integrate the strengths of the levies, such as community trust, into the reformed policing structure rather than just absorbing the personnel.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 12, 2026

PHC rules extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances menace to rule of law



PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has declared that extrajudicial killings, staged and fake encounters, and enforced disappearances constituted a serious menace to the rule of law, public confidence and the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

A larger bench consisting of Chief Justice SM Attique Shah, Justice Syed Arshad Ali, Justice Sahibzada Asadullah, Justice Mohammad Ijaz Khan and Justice Salahuddin declared: "No officer shall act beyond or against the law, and all law enforcement authorities are directed to prevent, report, and investigate such incidents. Any participation, complicity, or willful neglect shall attract criminal, civil, and departmental liability."

The court issued multiple directives and recommendations to stakeholders for reforming the criminal justice system (CJS), directing the provincial government to fully separate the investigation wing of the police from its operation wing with full administrative and financial autonomy.

It declared that to ensure fair, impartial, and transparent, an independent investigation cadre shall be created and all future appointments shall be made exclusively to that cadre.

The bench released a comprehensive 149-page judgement over the matter after considering the reports and arguments submitted by the stakeholders, including law, home, police,

prosecution and health departments, and senior lawyers, and the suggestions made by them for improving the CJS.

“The Provincial Government is confined to the formulation of high policy and superintendence, and shall not, directly or indirectly, interfere with operational command or encroach upon the autonomy and independence of the police hierarchy in the discharge of its lawful functions.”

The court declared that the law department was required to review all laws defining offences, so as to identify overlapping laws or laws creating jurisdictional confusion and address the anomalies highlighted by the bench; and, to propose appropriate amendments to the government for consolidation and clarification.

It added that an independent forensic science agency, with satellite regional offices at each divisional headquarters on the model of the Punjab Forensic Science Agency, shall be established with separate statutory status to ensure quality, authenticity and timely processing and submission of forensic reports.

The bench declared that the forensic laboratories shall function wholly independent of the operational and investigation branches and shall be run by qualified experts.

“Necessary amendments in relevant laws shall be made to secure the complete institutional and functional independence of the existing FSL, staff shortages therein shall be addressed through fresh recruitment, and the proposed FSL project shall be expedited with funds released without delay, to ensure the early and effective functioning of the criminal justice system.”

The judgement was delivered in two public interest petitions filed by a citizen Asifullah and a senior lawyer Shabbir Hussain Gigyani, respectively, related to different aspects of the CJS.

Barrister Amirullah Khan Chamkani appeared for the petitioner Asif Ullah and stated that the CJS in KP had almost collapsed due to structural and procedural failures, and that these deficiencies collectively resulted in systematic violations of fundamental rights, particularly the right to fair trial guaranteed under Article 10A of the Constitution.

Referring to a pilot project for Peshawar pending before the additional chief secretary (home), the bench observed: “Under the said pilot project, the operational, investigation, and prosecution wings of the police shall be distinctly separated at all tiers, and dedicated prosecutors shall be assigned to ensure effective and independent prosecution.”

The bench declared that the said pilot project should be approved and initiated at the earliest possible opportunity, without any further delay.

“The Provincial Government is further directed to ensure the provision of requisite funds, infrastructure, manpower, and other necessary resources to facilitate the effective and smooth implementation of the said project, in accordance with law with a view to alleviating the hardships and grievances faced by the citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.”

Scores of senior lawyers well versed in criminal law appeared in the matter including president of PHC Bar Association Aminur Rehman Yousafzai, former home secretary Dr Syed Akhter Ali Shah, Tafseel Khan Afridi, Mohammad Nisar Khan, Mohammad Tariq Yousafzai, Sahibzada Riazat-ul-Haq, Syed Akbar Ali Shah, Astaghfirullah Khan, Ahmad Farooq Khattak, Mian Arshad Jan, Saeed Khan, Sareer Khan, ex-district judge Syed Asghar Ali Shah and others.

The bench discussed in detail provisions of the Constitution, Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), KP Police Act, Police Order 2002, international law, etc. and put forward over a 100 directives to all the concerned stakeholders.

Directives for police and investigators: “The power of arrest shall be exercised with reasonable caution and care. Mere registration of an FIR, without sufficient material justifying arrest, shall not ordinarily warrant arrest and shall be avoided. Such discretion shall be exercised uniformly, without selectivity or discrimination,” the bench ordered.

It directed that in the event of an arrest, different guarantees should be observed strictly, including: the right to be informed promptly and clearly of the grounds of arrest; the right to consult and be assisted by counsel; the right against self-incrimination; and, the absolute prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

The bench directed that pre and post-arrest medical examinations should be strictly conducted, documented and reported to magistrate, as under Article 14 and 10-A of the Constitution no torture, coercion or unlawful confinement was permissible.

“The final report (investigation report) under section 173 CrPC shall be submitted within 14 days; failing that, an interim challan shall be submitted within the next three days,” the bench declared, adding that failure without lawful justification should attract action under different provisions of the PPC and KP Police Act.

It added that false, defective, incomplete, or misleading investigation reports may attract liability under sections 166(2), 167, and 218 PPC, 118 of the Police Act as well as departmental proceedings against delinquent officers.

The bench ordered the assigning of a reasonable number of cases to each IO, and that no officer be overburdened, so as to improve the quality of investigation. “A clear SOP shall be devised whereby the number of cases assigned to each investigator is determined on objective criteria, including the number of pending cases, their nature, and their severity.”

“Investigating Officers (IOs) shall ensure the preservation and systematic documentation of the crime scene in accordance with modern forensic standards, including photography and videography, preparation of sketches and scene plans, and lawful forensic sampling. Any deviation or non-compliance shall be explained by recording reasons in writing.”

The high court declared for courts that routine remand or judicial custody orders, where challans were not submitted within statutory time, resulted in illegal and unconstitutional detention, violating Articles 4, 9 and 10A of the Constitution and must be stopped forthwith.

It declared that the senior civil judges or judicial magistrates should all conduct monthly surprise visits of the police stations and Jails, with prior intimation to the district and sessions judge. "They shall inspect the condition of lock ups, case property, and other relevant material, and shall report any illegality or irregularity to the Chairperson of the Criminal Justice Coordination Committee.

The bench declared that the prosecutors should actively exercise their statutory duty of supervision under the KP Prosecution Service (Constitution, Functions and Powers) Act, 2005, by scrutinising investigation files from inception to ensure that investigations were lawful, impartial and completed within the statutory timeframe; and for that purpose regular consultation meetings between prosecutors and IOs should be held and documented.

"No challan shall be forwarded to Court unless the prosecutor has furnished a written opinion on its completeness and legal sufficiency. Where necessary, the prosecutor shall require the Investigating Officer to remove defects, collect additional evidence, and avoid reliance on dubious or superfluous witnesses," the bench declared.

For lawyers, the court ruled, "Any strike, boycott, or deliberate non-appearance before the Court, as well as any act that obstructs access to justice or restrains any person from entering any Court or its premises, is illegal and unconstitutional, being violative of Article 10A of the Constitution, and may, where applicable, attract sections 174, 186(1) and 186(2) PPC for, as the case may be, intentional non-attendance before the Court, obstructing a public servant in the discharge of public functions, or hampering the course of prosecution, in addition to any other penal provisions that may be attracted on a case-to-case basis," the bench ruled while putting forward multiple directives for the lawyers."

The court declared that medical officers shall conduct medico legal examinations without influence from the police or any party, and shall prepare medico legal reports strictly in accordance with law, accepted medical standards, and judicial requirements; the reports shall be detailed, clear, legible and free from ambiguity. It added that any attempt at interference shall be recorded and reported to the Illaqa Magistrate or the CJCC (criminal justice coordination committee), who shall take action in accordance with law.

"Delays in medico-legal reports, injury sheets, sexual assault reports, and post-mortem reports undermine investigations. Unjustified delay may attract proceedings under sections 166(1), 175 and 186(2) PPC," it warned.

The bench declared that the medical officers must receive mandatory training in medico-legal procedures, forensic pathology, sexual assault examination, documentation standards and chain of custody protocols.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 17, 2026

Rising cyber scams echo in NA



The National Assembly.

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly took up the issue of increasing cybercrimes in the country, which are badly affecting the masses.

Members highlighted the problem of fake driving challans, as well as fraudulent messages from educational institutions, banks, mobile phone companies and other entities. It was also informed that in some cases people responded to such fake messages and later faced charges of blasphemy and anti-state activities, resulting in imprisonment.

On the other hand, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry claimed that necessary steps were being taken to introduce reforms in the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in order to effectively tackle cybercrimes.

PTI leader Sheryar Afridi informed the House that a large number of young people were facing cases and imprisonment after being declared guilty of committing blasphemy and anti-state activities.

"A number of people told me outside Adiala jail that they and their family members are facing cases after responding to some fake messages on the internet from people posing as representatives of educational institutions, banks and other organisations," he added.

PPP legislator Shazia Marri drew the attention of the assembly to fake traffic challans (fines) sent by fraudsters and hackers. She said a large number of people had been cheated through such messages, as they believed them to be genuine and paid fines to the perpetrators.

In response, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said he had also received such messages claiming that he had committed traffic violations and was liable to pay fines.

Meanwhile, Mr Chaudhry said the NCCIA had received over 150,000 complaints last year. He said the best officers had been appointed to the agency and that efforts were under way to enhance its capacity.

He said over 81,000 of these complaints were related to financial crimes, and that 1,095 accused persons had been arrested. He added that cellular companies had been directed to enhance their security features for the issuance of SIMs.

Responding to a question, Mr Chaudhry said the air quality of Islamabad had improved compared to a year ago. He said measures such as vehicle emission certification were among the steps taken to improve the environment.

To another question, the minister expressed the government's commitment to purging Islamabad of all kinds of encroachments.

Responding to a calling attention notice, he said Vision 2027 would be announced this month for the development of the federal capital territory.

Privatisation

Later, State Minister for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani told the House that PIA had been privatised in the most transparent manner in accordance with the law and the Constitution. He clarified that only the core operations of the airline had been privatised, while PIA-owned hotels were not part of the transaction.

Expressing confidence in the move, Bilal Kayani said the privatisation would improve service delivery and strengthen the airline's financial position.

Responding to a calling attention notice, Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan said interventions had been made to achieve the target of \$6bn in exports.

Bills introduced

Meanwhile, several bills were laid before the House. These included the Export Development Fund Amendment Bill, 2026; the National Tariff Commission Amendment Bill, 2026; the Export-Import Bank of Pakistan Amendment Bill, 2026; the Pakistan Telecommunication Reorganisation Amendment Bill; the Life Insurance Nationalisation Amendment Bill; the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Amendment Bill; the Islamabad Capital Territory Condominium (Ownership and Management) Bill; and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Amendment Bill, 2026.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 17, 2026

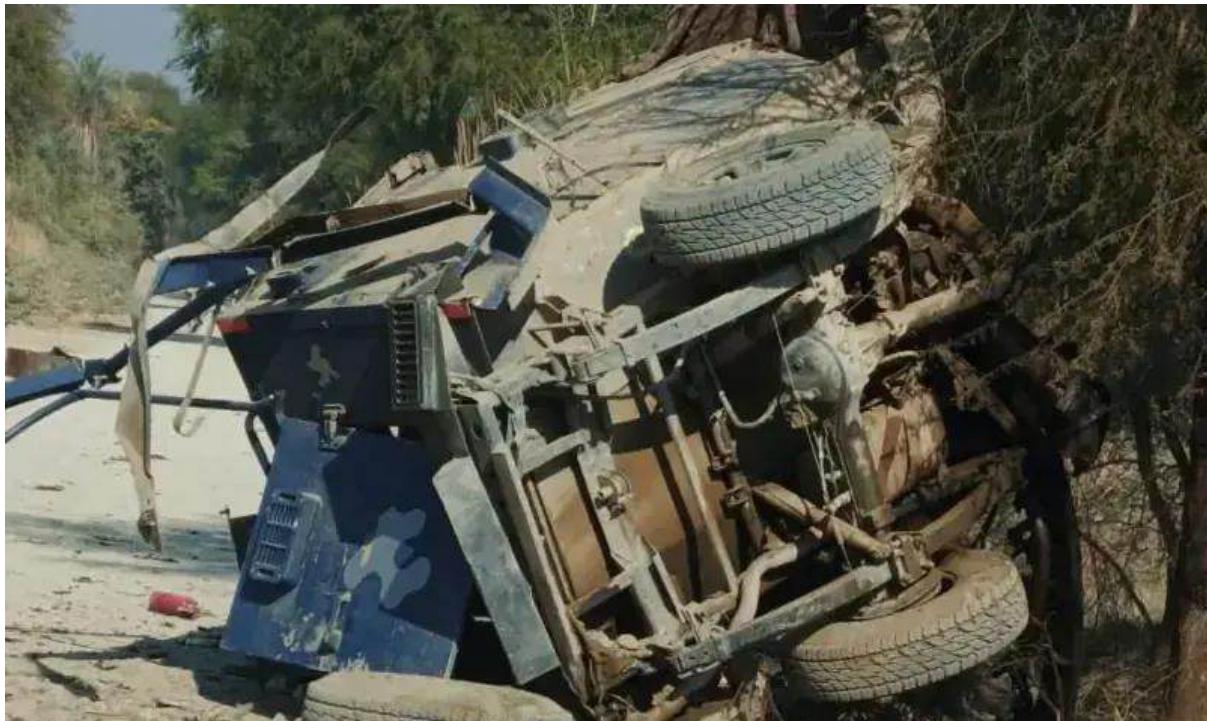
Cyber dangers

THE sharp rise in cybercrime in Pakistan, discussed in the National Assembly last week, shows that what was once an occasional nuisance has evolved into a pervasive threat, affecting citizens' finances, reputations and even liberty. With the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency receiving more than 150,000 complaints in a single year, the scale of the problem is stark. Lawmakers drew attention to scams that have become depressingly familiar: fake traffic challans, messages by fraudulent entities masquerading as banks and phishing attempts exploiting public trust. Even the NA Speaker said he had received such messages. More alarming, however, were revelations that some individuals who engaged with fake online communications later found themselves entangled in blasphemy or anti-state cases. Pakistan's experience mirrors global trends. Global research highlights how cybercrime now encompasses not only financial theft but also harassment, stalking, coercive control, misinformation and radicalisation. Motivations range from monetary gain to political manipulation. As digital technologies entrench themselves, the opportunities for misuse multiply – faster than the laws and institutions can respond.

The interior ministry's claim that reforms are being introduced in the NCCIA is encouraging, as are directives to telecom companies to strengthen SIM issuance processes. Yet institutional tinkering will not suffice. Pakistan's cyber laws require serious updating to tackle new forms of digital harm and the increasingly sophisticated tactics used by criminals. This overhaul must be undertaken with care. Cybercrime laws should not become tools to stifle free expression, criminalise dissent or widen the net of vague offences. The history of digital regulation in Pakistan offers ample reason for caution. Protecting citizens from online crime is a legitimate and urgent state responsibility. But it must be pursued through precise laws, transparent enforcement and respect for fundamental rights. The rising tide of cybercrime demands thoughtful reform, not overreach.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 19, 2026

Militant violence surges in January after December lull: PICSS



A police vehicle lies damaged after a blast hit it in KP's Tank district on Jan 12, 2026.

ISLAMABAD: After a noticeable decline in violence in December 2025, the first month of the new year witnessed a renewed surge in anti-state violence, leading to higher fatalities among militants, civilians and security personnel, according to official statistics.

Data released by the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) shows that combat-related deaths in January 2026 rose by 43 per cent compared to December 2025.

During the month, 242 militants were killed, while 73 civilians and 46 security force personnel lost their lives. Twelve militants were injured, while at least 71 civilians and 52 security personnel were also wounded.

PICSS reported that January saw 87 militant attacks nationwide, marking a 28pc increase from the 68 attacks recorded in December 2025. Of these, 38 attacks took place in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 20 in the province's tribal districts (erstwhile Fata), 27 in Balochistan and two in Punjab.

Balochistan emerged as the primary theatre of militant activity as well as security operations. The province reported the highest monthly militant toll since the current wave of militancy began there in 2001.

Although Balochistan experienced relative calm for much of the month, violence escalated sharply during the final two days. Simultaneous attacks by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) on at least 12 locations, followed by intensified security force operations, brought the province into sharp focus.

The month recorded at least three suicide attacks, two of them in Balochistan and claimed by the BLA. The province witnessed the deaths of at least 172 terrorists, most of them during the final two days of January.

Compared to the previous month, civilian deaths increased by 143pc, militant deaths by 35pc and security force fatalities by seven per cent.

Security forces arrested at least 60 suspected militants during the month, while militant groups kidnapped eight individuals.

Punjab reported only two militant attacks; however, security forces carried out a coordinated crackdown across central Punjab, including Lahore, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Mianwali.

At least 53 suspected militants were arrested, 48 of them from Lahore. Analysts say these arrests likely disrupted a major militant buildup aimed at targeting the city.

No militant attacks were reported in January from Sindh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Islamabad or Gilgit-Baltistan.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 2, 2026



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