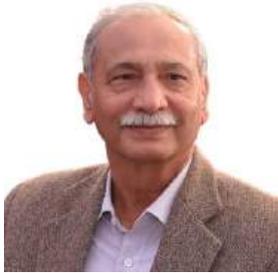


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Director's Note



It gives me great satisfaction to report that a team of practitioners, experts, lawyers and researchers of the Centre for Governance Research and Centre for Human Rights has almost finalised work on drafting a National Strategy against Organised Crime in Pakistan. UNODC Vienna and Country Office Islamabad is steering the process with the support of the UK Government. A multi stakeholders' workshop held in Islamabad on 16-17 February 2026 brought together the civil society and government stakeholders to deliberate on the objectives and sub-objectives of OC Strategy Framework.

We will continue to make a difference in combating serious and organised crime in Pakistan.

T. Khosa

Tariq Khosa

Director

Terror strikes capital for second time in less than three months

ISLAMABAD: The recent suicide blast at the Tarlai Imambargah is the second major terrorist attack in the federal capital in less than three months despite heightened security measures adopted by the police and the capital administration.

On November 11 last year, a lone suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the main entrance of the Judicial Complex in G-11 after a couple of unsuccessful attempts to enter the premises, killing a dozen people and injuring at least 36 others.

Soon after the incident, a number of police pickets were established on different roads of the capital.

In addition, the Islamabad Traffic Police narrowed some of the busy roads in the capital during rush hours by placing barricades on a daily basis to monitor suspicious activities, causing much difficulties for the commuters.

After the Tarlai Imambargah attack on Friday, some of the grief-stricken people, who had reached Pims hospital to trace their missing relatives, expressed their anger over the alleged failure of the police and the law enforcement agencies in preventing the devastating attack.

However, a senior police officer, when contacted, said the suicide attack had taken place in a rural area located on the outskirts of the capital city whereas the security measures had been put in place in the urban areas and various sectors of Islamabad.

He said the focus of the police was mainly on the government buildings and other sensitive installations, adding the police were also constantly monitoring the movements of the suspicious people within the capital city through the Safe City cameras besides keeping record of visitors staying in hotels and guest houses.

The official said only “human intelligence” was possible to monitor such activities in rural areas which generally served as “safe heavens” for the terrorists.

It may be recalled that talking to the media outside the Judicial Complex after the November 11 attack, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had declared that he had directed that no vehicle be allowed into Islamabad without an e-tag after two weeks.

Later, Minister of State for Interior Senator Talal Chaudhry, while addressing a press conference outside Parliament House alongside Inspector General of Police Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi on November 13, had said it would be declared mandatory for all vehicles in the city to have e-tags.

Authorities installed e-tag readers and cameras at 11 to 14 different points in the capital.

These e-tag readers and cameras were installed under the supervision of the Safe City Authority in Islamabad to read vehicle tags.

The tags and cameras were linked with the Safe City system and were installed on newly erected poles at these points to scan e-tags and vehicle registration plates.

Officials further said that approximately 400,000 to 500,000 vehicles move on the roads of the capital daily, with a large number entering the city from neighbouring areas, including Rawalpindi.

So far, e-tags have been installed on 203,915 vehicles up to February 5, the capital administration said, adding that around 19 points are still operational for installing e-tags on vehicles.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 7, 2026

The spectre of terror in Balochistan

BY IHSANULLAH TIPU MEHSUD

BALUCHISTAN: The latest wave of attacks across Balochistan has reignited fears that Pakistan is confronting a new insurgent playbook, one that is more coordinated, urban-focused and strategically ambitious. Claimed by the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army as “Operation Herof (Black Storm) 2.0,” the offensive signals a tactical shift that carries implications not only for domestic security but also for regional projects, foreign investment and the fragile stability of the province.

In recent years, BLA has emerged as a major militant threat in the province, responsible for numerous attacks, including complex suicide attacks, including deployment of female suicide attackers, as well as ambushes, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks, and targeted assassinations. The group has consistently targeted Chinese nationals working on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other energy and development projects in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan and Sindh provinces.

Since August 2024, BLA's tactics have shown a concerning trend, launching simultaneous attacks on multiple targets and locations, focusing on urban areas, apparently designed to overwhelm and paralyse state security apparatus.



Recent attacks also suggest that BLA militants may have infiltrated major urban centres prior to the attacks, allowing them to carry out operations at assigned time and locations as soon as directed by the group's leadership. This is a major concern that had been previously mentioned by the BLA itself when it first announced the formation of its so-called intelligence wing, Zirab.

The Haqqani Network reportedly adopted the same tactic during the Taliban's violent takeover in Afghanistan in 2021, following the Doha deal and the withdrawal of American forces. Taliban fighters had reportedly infiltrated Kabul well before the formal start of the

takeover process, aiming to rise up and attack multiple locations in the capital when given direction, paving the way for outside Taliban forces to enter. However, this tactic wasn't fully utilised as President Ghani fled and the Taliban entered Kabul without facing resistance. This strategy may inspire the Pakistani Taliban to adopt it in the future.

For a guerrilla group like the BLA, confronting a well-armed, well-numbered, well-disciplined and internationally acknowledged conventional force like the Pakistani security apparatus is generally considered a high-risk operational tactic. Consequently, as of the time of writing this article, security forces have neutralised over 100 BLA militants involved in the January 31 attacks in Balochistan, while the state security apparatus has suffered a loss of only 10 personnel.

A prime example is the Afghan Taliban, who managed to take control of all of Afghanistan within a few weeks due to the weakened Afghan army and the withdrawal of American forces. For two decades, the Afghan Taliban were unable to maintain control over any substantial territory while Western forces were responsible for security. However, as soon as the withdrawal began, the Taliban swiftly took over the entire country in just a few weeks.

Such brazen action by a guerrilla force is only effective when the conventional enemy is significantly weak and can be completely overrun.



But for BLA, the attacks are effective on propaganda and narrative-building fronts, two elements considered vital for terrorist organisations for fresh recruitment, revenue generation, and local intelligence gathering. BLA's attacks have made global media headlines and dominated Pakistan's social media landscape. Repeated actions like this attract and inspire disgruntled, sympathetic youth to join the so-called liberation movement.

Pakistan is already heavily engaged in dealing with two ideologically distinct but operationally almost similar security threats: the Taliban threats in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and the Baloch armed separatists in Balochistan. Furthermore, a pattern has emerged in

recent years where one front (K-P) becomes relatively calm, but another front (Balochistan) suddenly flares up, indicating possible coordination between both against a common enemy.

Stopping or responding quickly to attacks in remote areas of Balochistan by BLA-J, the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), and other factions, including the BRAS alliance, is understandable, but repeated attacks on major urban centres across Balochistan, and their consequent overrun – even if for a few hours – including the capital city of Quetta and its heavily guarded Red Zone, raise serious questions about security arrangements amid the already prevailing grave threats that have emerged in recent years.



According to local officials in Balochistan, attacks occurred approximately 100 meters from the Chief Minister House, Governor House and Civil Secretariat. That goes on to show that such operations are unlikely to be spontaneous and typically require days of preparation and coordinated militant buildup, pointing to potential gaps in timely ground intelligence and early threat detection.

A significant revamp of security measures is essential, as conventional strategies have been proving outdated and futile in addressing the rapidly evolving threats posed by non-state actors in Pakistan.

The Pakistani state's persistent lack of consensus on a consistent strategy for tackling terrorism is a major factor complicating and prolonging the issue. Policy shifts with changes in political and military leadership, often radically, have become a recurring pattern.

This was even evident till recently when the previous political and military leadership pursued a vigorous dialogue approach with the Pakistan Taliban, favouring negotiations over use of force. As soon as the leadership changed, the new setup adopted a completely opposite stance, opting for a use of force and abandoning dialogue.



The same dilemma has long defined Balochistan where a decades-long instability highlights the state's indecision – is it a political issue needing dialogue or a security issue needing force? Now, with violence entrenched, a dual approach is needed: integrate the province into the national mainstream by granting political rights to genuine stakeholders, especially the middle class, who are more influential than traditional nawabs and sardars in shaping militancy, narrative and politics. At the same time, apply a robust security-driven approach to contain escalating violence. Containment, not elimination, should be the priority at this stage.

While total elimination of terrorism is an ideal goal, in Balochistan's context, a containment strategy would be more practical and sustainable, considering the complexity, cost and risk of unintended consequences and backfiring.



Pursuing a total elimination strategy at this stage in Balochistan risks causing collateral damage, human rights abuses and further alienation, which would fuel militant propaganda, boost potential recruitment and ultimately create more terrorists than were eliminated.

Beyond battlefield outcomes, perception remains a decisive battleground. Militant groups thrive on their impression as much as ideology and resources. The state should aim to shatter

the myth of invincibility around BLA and BLF by showing to the youth in Balochistan that they are beatable.

For militants, one key factor driving their recruitment, beyond ideology and resources, is the impression of resilience and invincibility against a stronger enemy that they portray to their target audience. BLA's attacks on January 31 were mainly aimed at reinforcing this impression, despite the group suffering greater losses than the state. Containment of Baloch armed separatists can gradually dismantle their perceived impression and the passive support they enjoy among a segment of youth, deterring them from romanticising militant groups. For these groups, passive support on the ideological front – online or in-person group discussions – is as crucial as actual recruitment.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, FEBRUARY 8, 2026

TTP may morph into 'extra-regional threat'



In this file photo, Taliban fighters hold weapons in an undisclosed location in Nangarhar province.

- UN Security Council monitoring report says outfit enjoys preferential treatment among terror groups, thrives on 'tolerance or active support' from Afghan Taliban
- Al Qaeda focused on 'external operations', acts as 'service provider' for other groups
- IS-Khorasan remains potent threat despite crackdown, focused on increasing outreach using cyber tech

ISLAMABAD: A United Nations Security Council report has warned that the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) enjoys preferential treatment among terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, heightening concerns among member states that the outfit could pose an extra-regional threat.

The warning was contained in the 37th report of the UN Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, covering the period between July and December 2025.

The report stated: "In Afghanistan, the de facto authorities continued to provide a permissive environment for a range of terrorist groups, notably Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan."

It drew a direct comparison between the operational space available to the TTP and that afforded to other militant groups, and linked this disparity to a sharp deterioration in Pakistan's security situation.

“TTP, however, was accorded greater liberty and support from the de facto authorities, and consequently, TTP attacks against Pakistan increased, amplifying regional tensions,” the report said. Of more than 3,500 terrorist attacks attributed to the TTP last year, over 2,100 were recorded in the second half of the year.

According to the monitoring team, the TTP “operates as one of the largest terrorist groups in Afghanistan”, reflecting its entrenched presence across multiple provinces and its sustained ability to plan and execute cross-border attacks.

The TTP is believed to have a strong presence in Afghanistan’s eastern and south-eastern border provinces, including Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, Paktika – including the Barmal district – and Paktia. There are reports of new or expanded training centres in these locations, often under the influence of networks such as the Haqqani Network.

Various UN Security Council Monitoring Team assessments indicated that the TTP benefited from Taliban tolerance or active support, including access to safe houses, such as guesthouses in Kabul for senior leaders, movement passes, weapons permits and logistical assistance. These arrangements persist despite internal Taliban debates that have at times viewed the TTP as a liability due to strained relations with Pakistan.

Conservative estimates placed the number of TTP fighters in Afghanistan at around 6,000, with the group recruiting from Afghan Taliban ranks and receiving operational enhancements.

‘Extra-regional threat’

Member states, the report said, were increasingly alarmed not only by the scale of TTP’s activities but also by the direction in which the group could be heading. “Some member states expressed concern that TTP may deepen its cooperation with Al Qaeda-aligned groups in order to attack a wider range of targets, potentially resulting in an extra-regional threat,” the report noted.

These concerns were situated within a broader ecosystem of collaboration between terrorist groups in Afghanistan. The report said that Al Qaeda “acted as a service provider and multiplier for other terrorist groups in Afghanistan in terms of training and advice, principally to TTP”.

Member states feared that deeper cooperation could lead to more structured alliances, joint planning and access to a wider pool of fighters and resources, expanding the range of potential targets beyond Pakistan.

While the report did not state that the TTP was currently carrying out attacks outside the region, it reflected growing international concern that Afghanistan’s permissive environment under Taliban rule could allow the group, with Al Qaeda’s backing, to acquire capabilities and ambitions extending beyond South Asia.

The report also cautioned that Al Qaeda’s regional affiliate was adapting its posture. “There were concerns that AQIS was increasingly focused on external operations. Such operations would likely be unclaimed or deniable operations, perhaps as part of the umbrella group

Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (not listed), which declared itself in April, so as not to create difficulties for the Taliban as hosts of AQIS.”

Detailing the footprint of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, the report stated, “Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) remained active in south-eastern Afghanistan, where the Haqqani Network exerts considerable influence. Osama Mahmoud, the ‘emir’ of AQIS, and Yahya Ghauri, his deputy, were reported to be in Kabul, with the media cell of AQIS based in Herat.”

‘ISIL-K remains resilient’

The report noted that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) remained resilient in 2025 despite sustained counterterrorism pressure and losses.

According to the report, “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan was under sustained counterterrorism pressure, but it retained a potent capability, coupled with intent to conduct external operations.”

The monitoring team said the terror outfit faced significant losses as a result of security operations by regional states and continued military action by the Taliban inside Afghanistan. These pressures reduced the overall number of attacks but did not dismantle the group’s operational base or its ability to regenerate.

The report noted that ISIL-K “was active mainly in northern Afghanistan, particularly Badakhshan, and areas close to the Pakistani border”, where it maintained networks of cells to project a regional threat and, potentially, operations beyond the immediate region.

Despite being under pressure, the group retained “significant operational and combat capability and the ability to rapidly replace fighters, including through online recruitment”, according to the report.

The campaign against ISIL-K also pushed it to seek alliances with other armed factions across Afghanistan as it adapted to the evolving security environment.

The monitoring team said ISIL-K continued efforts to expand its reach through technology, noting that ISIL and Al Qaeda “continued their efforts to build cybercapabilities”, a trend that member states saw as enhancing propaganda, recruitment and operational planning.

The monitoring team’s assessment that the group’s strong recruitment pipelines and expanding cyber capabilities in 2025 pointed to enabling factors that may have contributed to its ability to plan and execute the Feb 6 gun-and-bomb attack on a Shia mosque on the outskirts of Islamabad.

The report also pointed to growing concerns about militant collaboration. Member states reported that the Balochistan Liberation Army collaborated with the TTP and ISIL-K “through shared training camps and resources, coordinating attacks and meetings between commanders”.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

Extra-regional threat

THE UN Security Council Monitoring Team’s regular reports point to the threats terrorist groups continue to pose across the world. These reports have long painted a grim picture of the situation in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the permissive environment in that country for violent outfits.

The latest document suggests that the banned TTP may potentially pose an extra-regional threat. Pakistan has been suffering from the brutality of TTP violence for nearly two decades. But if the warning is not heeded, the terrorist group may spread its tentacles to other states. The UN report also warns about the presence of IS-K terrorists at locations along the Pak-Afghan border. The latest document presents an unflattering yet unsurprising picture of the terrorist milieu in Afghanistan. For example, it says that the TTP is “one of the largest terrorist groups in Afghanistan”, while it is accorded “greater liberty and support from the de facto authorities” (the Afghan Taliban).

The report also expresses apprehensions that the TTP may expand cooperation with Al Qaeda, which, too, enjoys cordial ties with the Kabul regime. And while IS-K is under “sustained counterterrorism pressure”, the violent outfit retains “significant operational and combat capability”. One bloodstained example of these capabilities was witnessed in the shape of the Feb 6 imambargah bombing in Islamabad. Notably, the UNSC report says that while the Afghan Taliban authorities say no terrorist groups are active in their country, “no Member State supported this view”.

As the report illustrates, there is a need for immediate action where the terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan is concerned. Pakistan has borne the brunt of the TTP’s barbaric campaign, losing thousands of valuable lives to the group’s terrorist attacks.

If the TTP is not stopped in its tracks immediately, other countries in the region may be next on the terrorist group’s hit list. That is why, as this paper has consistently argued, there is a need to address the problem of Afghanistan-based militancy collectively, with all of Kabul’s neighbours sending the same message to the Taliban: they must take action against violent groups on Afghan soil. Many would have thought that the Taliban would have learnt a lesson from hosting Al Qaeda during their first stint in power, thereafter paving the way for the US invasion following 9/11.

But this is clearly not the case as Kabul’s rulers continue to host bloodthirsty militants, even as they fight IS-K – purely for ideological reasons since IS-K does not recognise the Taliban’s legitimacy. Afghanistan’s neighbours must be unambiguous in stating that if Kabul wants regional recognition, trade and integration, it must rein in terrorist groups. Further, Pakistan must stay alert and prevent the infiltration of IS-K terrorists and neutralise their cells and collaborators in the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 12, 2026

Terrorism spiral

WITH a spate of terrorist attacks occurring in the country, a national-level response is required to address the issue. The latest atrocity has occurred in Bajaur, where a suicide bomber reportedly belonging to the banned TTP attacked a checkpoint in Bajaur on Monday. At least 12 people were martyred in the incident – 11 security personnel and one minor girl. Meanwhile, on the same day, a motorcycle rigged with explosives was blown up outside a police station in Bannu, causing two fatalities. Furthermore, law enforcers said on Wednesday that terrorists attacked a police station and a customs office in Dera Ismail Khan, martyring a policeman and a customs officer. They added that the terrorists also fired at passenger buses in the area. Several acts of deadly violence have occurred in this area over the past few weeks.

Following the Bajaur attack, the prime minister commented that “under the vision of Azm-i-Istehkam, security forces are gaining major success in the fight against terrorism”. While that may be so, Pakistan continues to pay a high price as it loses security personnel and civilians in frequent terrorist attacks. For example, apart from the latest violence in KP, an imambargah in Islamabad was attacked earlier this month causing major casualties, while only days before the atrocity in the capital terrorists had launched coordinated attacks in Balochistan. Unless the state takes a fresh approach towards terrorism, we may see the same high levels of violence in the current year as we did in 2025. Last year was said to be the bloodiest in over a decade. The threats may be varied – separatist terrorists in Balochistan, religiously inspired elements in KP – but the response must ensure that all violent elements are neutralised, and the state is able to establish peace in the disturbed areas. There has been some welcome recent cooperation between the KP government – which remains the hardest hit province – and the centre in the field of counterterrorism; such efforts must be intensified. A whole-of-nation approach is needed, applying kinetic measures where required, conducting intel-based operations as well as sociopolitical interventions as needed, to defeat terrorism. The federal and provincial governments, lawmakers and the security apparatus, along with CT experts, must put their heads together to arrive at a solution that can bring lasting peace to Pakistan.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Pakistan becomes major drug hub as Afghanistan exports crisis

Long considered a transit route, Pakistan is now emerging as a major hub for both drug production and consumption. This shift follows the upheaval triggered by the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021.

A year later, the new Afghan authorities abruptly banned the cultivation of poppy, the raw material used to produce opium and heroin. The decision led to a dramatic collapse in Afghan output. Cultivation quickly moved across the border into Pakistan's Balochistan province, which has, in just a few years, become one of the region's new centres of illegal poppy farming.

At the same time, Afghan trafficking networks have pivoted heavily toward synthetic drugs. As a result, methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan is now flooding the Pakistani market.

This expanding drug economy is having direct and devastating consequences for Pakistani society, where millions are now battling addiction.

SOURCE: FRANCE24.COM

IS-Khorasan a 'bigger threat', 'more entrenched' than TTP

ISMAIL KHAN



Security personnel stand guard outside an imambargah following an explosion, in Islamabad on February 6, 2026.

WITHIN hours of the bombing of an Islamabad Imambargah on Feb 6, Pakistani intelligence and law enforcement zeroed in on a home in Hakimabad, Nowshera, 49km east of Peshawar.

“It was a race against time. Sifting through technical data, establishing coordinates and isolating the target,” a senior security official said. “It didn’t take long before we knew the location.”

By late evening, they had already laid siege to the residence, taken up position and called out those inside to come out, hands raised, and surrender.

For a moment, there was no movement. But then, someone showed a raised hand from behind the door, indicating their willingness to surrender. Except that he didn’t.

Aiming a 9mm gun straight at the security cordon, the lone gunman fired straight shots, hitting an assistant sub inspector of the police right in the chest, killing him on the spot, and injuring two intelligence officers.

The exchange of fire didn’t last long, though.

Within minutes, the gunman, said to be in his mid-thirties, was shot and killed. But the brief distraction offered by the gun battle gave those inside the house sufficient time to destroy cellphones and any other evidence of communication that could possibly betray them.

The gunman turned out to be a high-value target identified as Yousaf alias Qasim aka Idrees – the leader of the militant Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) group in the Bajaur region, and the main handler of the Imambargah suicide bomber, carrying a reward of Rs12 million.

What followed was more startling, as the counter-terrorism department dug further into this cell's activities. The gang, it turned out, had been involved in a series of assassinations and suicide bombings before stepping out of the tribal district to relocate to Gujranwala, Lahore and finally to Nowshera's Hakimabad. Investigators now have enough evidence to link them to the targeted assassination of all 20 men involved in the lynching to death of an IS-K operative, out to kill a local JUI-F leader for issuing a scathing attack against it.

They were also linked to the assassination of senior JUI-F figure Mufti Sultan Mahmood in Bajaur in October 2019, a suicide bombing at the party's convention on July 30, 2021 that left more than 54 dead and over a hundred wounded, and the bombing and assassination of ANP leader Maulana Khanzeb on July 10, 2025. Additionally, investigators say, the group was involved in the killings of at least 15 policemen, as well as the murder of the Nawagai assistant commissioner in a bombing on July 2, 2025.

Investigators say that Idrees a tailor by profession – had been on their radar for some time, but had managed to evade capture by changing locations, moving with women and children, and avoiding staying at one location for longer periods.

"Pretty much living like nomads, leaving whatever little they had behind before moving onto the next location without notifying the landlord," was how one official described his movements. What surprised investigators the most was the role of the women in the group. Investigators have now established that not only did the suicide bomber travel to Afghanistan's Kunar in May 2025, the women had also crossed the border using tampered passports.

Not only that, but one of the women had carried the suicide vest from Bajaur to Islamabad, and handed it over to another woman in the group. "They are all indoctrinated. The whole family is radicalised," a senior investigator said.

As investigators dig deeper into the working and operations of IS-Khorasan, there is a realisation that its network is far bigger and more spread out than previously thought from the Middle East to Central Asian Republics, and onwards into Afghanistan and Pakistan.

They use cryptocurrency for money transfer and employ encrypted communication apps, making their communications very hard to break. Based on what they have learned, investigators now consider IS-Khorasan a much bigger threat than the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan in terms of its capability for mass killing, compartmentalisation, commitment to ideology, resources and the sophistication of their operations.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 26, 2026

3 European countries, Pakistan agree on promoting legal pathways to counter illegal migration: Naqvi



Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, Spain's Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska, and Greece's Migration Minister Athanasios Plevris pose for a picture as they meet in Rome on February 26, 2026.

Three European countries Italy, Spain and Greece – and Pakistan reached a consensus to promote legal pathways to “effectively combat illegal migration”, according to Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The consensus was reached at a four-nation conference in Rome, Naqvi said in a post on social media platform X, adding that ministers from Italy, Spain and Greece attended the meeting.

“Productive meeting in Rome with my counterparts from Italy, Spain and Greece at the four-nation conference on curbing illegal migration.

“Pakistan, Italy, Spain and Greece agreed on a coordinated strategy against illegal migration, human smuggling and narcotics, including a joint policy framework and rapid-response mechanism,” he said.

The interior minister added that a consensus was also reached at the conference on “promoting legal pathways to effectively counter illegal migration [and] repatriation of criminals to face the law”.



“European partners appreciated Pakistan’s strong actions, noting a 47 per cent reduction in illegal migration, and agreed on enhanced European Union-supported capacity building,” he said.

Separately, a statement by the interior ministry also said that the three European countries endorsed Naqvi’s proposal of establishing legal pathways as a strategy to combat illegal migration and human smuggling during the conference.

Italy’s Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, Spain’s Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska and Greece’s Migration Minister Athanasios Plevri agreed that creating regulated legal channels for migration was the “most effective way to dismantle the networks of human smugglers and discourage dangerous irregular journeys”.

Agreeing with Naqvi’s proposal to curb illegal migration through legal pathways, they also decided to “extend full support” to Pakistan for capacity building via the European Union.

The participants also agreed to adopt a “coordinated strategy at all levels to combat illegal migration”, and a joint policy framework was finalised to counter illegal migration, human smuggling and narcotics trafficking.

Moreover, it was agreed that criminals involved in “serious offences” would be repatriated from Europe to Pakistan to face legal proceedings, the interior ministry’s statement said.

The four ministers emphasised the need for strengthening coordination and enhancing a joint and rapid response mechanism to curb illegal migration, the statement said, adding that they also decided to hold the next meeting in Pakistan later this year.

The statement quoted Naqvi as telling the European ministers that mafias involved in illegal migration had been brought under the law.

He noted that Europe was one of the most affected regions by illegal migration and stressed that a coordinated mechanism could effectively address this challenge.

The three European countries also “appreciated Pakistan’s efforts for curbing illegal migration and lauded the 47 per cent reduction” in such cases, the statement said.

It quoted the Italian minister as saying that “Pakistani institutions have taken excellent steps” against illegal migration. Meanwhile, the Spanish minister commended the “exemplary actions taken under Naqvi’s leadership”, the statement said.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 26, 2026

8,000 died or vanished on migrant routes in 2025: UN



Rescued refugees and migrants stand aboard a boat at the town of Paleochora in Greece in November 2022.

BERLIN: At least 7,667 people died or went missing last year on migration routes around the world, but the true death toll is likely higher, the UN's migration agency reported. The figure was down on 2024 when almost 9,200 deaths were recorded, but the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said numbers nonetheless reflected the "global scale" of the crisis faced by migrants.

"The continued loss of life on migration routes is a global failure we cannot accept as normal," said IOM Director General Amy Pope. She argued for safer legal routes, adding: "These deaths are not inevitable." Funding cuts for aid groups, crackdowns on humanitarian NGOs and limited access to data are making it more difficult to accurately track deaths, the UN agency said. Sea crossings such as the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa to Europe remain among the deadliest routes for migrants, the report said.

At least 2,108 people went missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean in 2025, and another 1,047 died or vanished while trying to cross to Spain's Canary Islands, according to the IOM. The actual figures are "likely higher", it said. The first two months of 2026 have already seen "an unprecedented number of migrant deaths" in the Mediterranean, the agency warned, with 606 people recorded dead on the crossing as of Tuesday even as arrivals in Italy decline sharply.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 27, 2026

A collective effort

CONSIDERING the relentless wave of terrorist attacks Pakistan has been facing over the past few weeks, the administration has done the right thing by bringing all stakeholders on board in order to formulate a comprehensive response. Moreover, keeping in mind the growing footprint of IS-K locally, it is all the more necessary to neutralise this terrorist group before it can cause further havoc.

A meeting of federal and provincial officials, including senior police officers, on Wednesday decided to confront the wave of terrorism as a “top priority”, with the centre assuring the provinces of provision of resources and technical support. The minister of state for interior, who chaired the meeting, told this paper that the bases of terrorist groups responsible for bloodshed in Pakistan including the Islamabad imambargah attack were targeted in Afghanistan, and separately commented that retaliatory attacks were expected after Pakistan took military action. Afghanistan’s unprovoked firing at Pakistani positions on Thursday has confirmed these apprehensions.

Just as the nation came together in the past in the aftermath of the APS tragedy to formulate the National Action Plan, a similar effort is required today to confront the menace of terrorism. Working in silos is not an option; all pillars of the state must work in tandem to defeat terrorism. In this regard, while political differences can exist between the centre and the provincial governments, all stakeholders need to be on the same page to ensure maximum security for all.

The framework exists for a robust counterterrorism drive, such as NAP 2.0 as well as Nacta and the creation of the National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre last year. Just as Pakistan was able to quell the wave of terrorist violence during previous years, it can do so again if holistic policies are pursued, with buy-in from all. The state cannot control what occurs beyond its borders; but internal security can certainly be better managed by cracking down on terrorists and their facilitators.

In this regard, it has emerged that IS-K may prove to be a bigger security threat than the banned TTP the latter group being at the forefront of the current wave of violence. As reported in this paper, following the Islamabad imambargah attack the mastermind of the atrocity was traced to Nowshera in KP. Subsequent investigations revealed that the suspect was leading an active IS-K cell in Bajaur.

This gang had reportedly been responsible for several targeted killings and suicide bombings, while women were also active members of the cell. One of the women members had reportedly delivered the suicide vest to the capital for the Islamabad bombing. Further probes are required to break any connected cells, with thorough action against IS-K terrorists within the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 27, 2026

UN terms violence against women ‘a global emergency’



The United Nations headquarters building is pictured through a window with the UN logo in the foreground in the Manhattan borough of New York August 15, 2014.

GENEVA: The UN rights chief has decried mounting threats to women’s rights worldwide, highlighting rampant femicide and horrific abuse exposed in cases like that of US sex offender Jefferey Epstein.

Addressing the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Volker Turk slammed “social systems that silence women and girls” and allow powerful men to abuse them with impunity.

“Violence against women, including femicide, is a global emergency,” the High Commissioner for Human Rights told the UN’s top rights body.

He highlighted the extreme situation in Afghanistan, warning that the “system of segregation imposed on women is reminiscent of apartheid, based on gender rather than race”.

He also pointed to two cases that have recently caused shock waves around the world: those of convicted Epstein and of French rape survivor Gisele Pelicot.

Both cases “show the extent of the exploitation and abuse of women and girls”, Turk said, asking: “does anyone think there are not many more men like Dominique Pelicot or Jeffrey Epstein?”

Epstein associated with the world’s rich, famous and powerful despite his conviction in 2008 to procuring a child for prostitution.

He died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while facing trial on sex trafficking charges. His death was ruled a suicide.

Gisele Pelicot gave the public insight into her shocking case when she waived her right to anonymity during the 2024 trial in France of her ex-husband Dominique and dozens of strangers who he brought in to rape her while she was unconscious.

“Such horrific abuse is enabled by social systems that silence women and girls, and insulate powerful men from accountability,” Turk charged.

“States must investigate all alleged crimes, protect survivors, and ensure justice without fear or favour,” he insisted.-

SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 28, 2026

Pakistan lauded for 47% drop in illegal migration



Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi led the country's delegation at a six-nation interior ministers' conference in Warsaw.

WARSAW: Pakistan's efforts to curb illegal immigration and dismantle human smuggling networks received international recognition as Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi led the country's delegation at a six-nation interior ministers' conference in Warsaw.

The participants praised Islamabad for achieving a 47 per cent reduction in illegal migration to Europe.

The conference, held in the Polish capital on Friday, brought together interior ministers from Pakistan, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Lithuania to deliberate on illegal immigration and broader security cooperation.

The six interior ministers highly appreciated Pakistan's effective measures to curb illegal immigration and human smuggling and agreed to formulate a coordinated roadmap to discourage illegal immigration and promote legal migration channels.

The meeting was attended by Poland's Marcin Kierwiński, Estonia's Igor Taro, Latvia's Richards Kozlovskis, Finland's Heikki Tamminen and Lithuania's Gintaras Aliksandravičius, who represented their respective governments.

Participants agreed on joint measures and enhanced coordination to counter illegal immigration. All countries decided to appoint a focal person within their respective ministries of interior to strengthen communication and coordination mechanisms.

The six countries also agreed to provide official-level employment opportunities for Pakistan as part of efforts to promote legal migration pathways.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi told the conference that Pakistan is implementing "a comprehensive strategy against human smuggling and illegal immigration" and that the ongoing crackdown against trafficking networks has produced "encouraging results".

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, FEBRUARY 28, 2026



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