



CGR DIGEST

Vol. 06 | June 2026

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Reshaping the world with fairness and peace

FRED S. TENG



THE world does not suffer from a shortage of institutions. What it suffers from is a weakening respect for the principles that give institutions legitimacy.

If the foundation on which a building stands is eroded, the structure is at risk. At the centre of the modern international order stands the United Nations Charter. Signed in 1945 after the devastation wreaked by two world wars, the Charter was not merely a diplomatic document drafted at a conference.

It was a civilisational commitment and represented humanity's collective decision that war should no longer be treated as a normal instrument of national ambition, sovereignty should be protected, disputes should be settled peacefully, and international cooperation should serve the common progress of humanity.

Eight decades later, the authority of the Charter is under severe strain. Armed conflicts continue. Unilateral sanctions are increasingly imposed outside the UN framework. Military interventions are justified through selective interpretations of security. Global governance is divided by bloc politics.

Many smaller and developing countries fear that international rules are applied unevenly, depending on the power and interests of those involved. This is why the world urgently needs to revitalise the authority of the UN Charter and renew the role of the UN itself. This does not mean treating the UN as perfect, but recognising that without the Charter, the world becomes more dangerous, less predictable and more vulnerable to the rule of force.

The Charter rests on several basic principles: sovereign equality, noninterference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, prohibition on the use of force except under limited lawful conditions, collective security, human rights, development, and international cooperation.

These principles are not abstract ideals, but the operating system of international coexistence. Sovereign equality protects smaller countries from domination by stronger states. Peaceful settlement gives diplomacy a chance before conflict becomes irreversible. Collective security prevents individual states from claiming unlimited authority to define threats and punish others.

Development cooperation recognises that peace cannot be separated from economic dignity. Human rights remind states that sovereignty carries responsibilities as well as protection.

The UN Charter did not weaken overnight, but due to repeated departures from its spirit. The use of force has too often been justified without clear UN authorisation. When powerful countries act first and seek legal or moral justification later, the authority of collective security is eroded.

Unilateral sanctions imposed beyond the UN framework, especially with extraterritorial effects, create a parallel system of punishment that hurts ordinary people and weakens the legitimacy of international law.

International institutions have also been pulled into geopolitical rivalry. Instead of serving as platforms for dialogue, they are sometimes used as arenas for accusation, pressure, and alignment.

At the same time, the voices of the Global South remain underrepresented in global decision-making. Many developing nations see a gap between the promise of sovereign equality and the actual distribution of power. This gap damages confidence in the system.

New global challenges make revitalisation even more urgent. Artificial intelligence, climate change, pandemics, cybersecurity, debt distress, food insecurity and space governance are moving faster than existing institutions can respond.

If the UN cannot adapt to these realities, its authority will weaken not because its principles are wrong, but because its mechanisms appear inadequate. Despite its limitations, the UN remains indispensable because it is the only international organisation with near-global membership, the only institution where large and small countries sit under one roof.

The UN provides legitimacy that no military alliance, economic bloc, or informal coalition can replace. It gives developing countries a voice, creates channels of communication even when relations among major powers deteriorate, and coordinates humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, development, public health cooperation, refugee support, climate discussions, and international law.

The UN does not eliminate conflict, but it provides a place where conflict can be managed. It does not guarantee justice, but it preserves a language of justice. It does not always stop war, but without it, the world would have even fewer barriers against war.

Revitalising the authority of the Charter requires more than speeches. It requires discipline from major powers. They must recommit to the principle that force should not be used except in accordance with the Charter. They must avoid treating international law as a tool to be invoked when it is convenient and ignored when it is not. They must accept that security cannot be built on humiliation, exclusion, or coercion.

The UN Security Council must recover its role as the central mechanism for collective security. Its permanent members have special privileges, but also special obligations. The veto should not become a shield for paralysis. Nor should frustration with the veto become an excuse to bypass the Charter.

Revitalising the UN also requires making it more representative. The world of 1945 is not the world of today. Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the broader Global South now play a far greater role in global growth, population, trade, diplomacy, and development. Reform should be approached carefully but seriously, with the goal of making the UN more legitimate, balanced, and capable.

Development must also return to the center of the UN mission. Peace and security cannot be separated from development. A world of deep inequality will not be stable. Poverty reduction, infrastructure, education, health, climate adaptation, digital access, and fairer participation in the global economy should not be treated as secondary issues. They are the foundations of peace.

A Charter-based world order is not an argument against any country or bloc, but an appeal for restraint, legitimacy and survival. It not only protects the weak from the strong, but also protects the strong from the consequences of overreach. It gives rivals a framework for coexistence and gives diplomacy time to work.

If nations return to the Charter not as a ceremonial document, but as a living framework for coexistence, the UN can be the house where conflict is restrained, dialogue remains possible, power is held accountable, and humanity remembers that peace is not the absence of disagreement, but the discipline to resolve disagreement without destroying the world we share. – China Daily/ANN

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 1, 2026

Reviewing the Virtual Assets Act 2026

DR FAIZA ISMAI

The Virtual Assets Act 2026 (VAA) is a well-crafted law that goes to the heart of legal issues in virtual asset dealings. Plain language and addressing fundamental issues of the digital market are two features that make it accessible. It is important to note that, unlike usual practice, this law is not a verbatim copy of the law applicable in any other jurisdiction in Pakistan.

Although there is widespread criticism of the VAA 2026 being introduced under the influence of the Financial Action Task Force, the Act certainly addresses money laundering-related issues through a separate section in Chapter 8. It is legislation that introduces compliance-based regulation to ensure the protected entry of digital assets within Pakistan's financial system.

The opening of Pakistan's financial market is well addressed in the law. Licensing requirements, the setting up of the Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA), reference to Shariah-compliant assets, and provision of sandboxes to ensure smooth entry have been well structured.

Careful listing of all the relevant regulators in section 17 for the purpose of coordinated regulation and supervision is a well-thought-out rule. Combined with the use of mutual legal assistance among international stakeholders, this law produces a comprehensive and well-knit compliance-based regulation.

Regulatory gaps and unresolved issues

Certain challenges remain, such as facilitation of exchanges, prevention of active wrongdoing such as Ponzi schemes and fraud, and prevention of speculative activities. There is a need for clarity regarding disclosure requirements in the VAA 2026 and the Companies Act 2017. Similarly, inside information and insider trading, as per section 25 of the VAA 2026 and the Securities Act, need to be reconciled.

Since the law ensures the smooth entry of digital assets into the country's financial system, the later stages of regulation, supervision, and enforcement of the digital assets market (DAM) are missing. For instance, virtual asset exchanges, their licensing, and operations have not been addressed in sufficient operational detail in the law. Moreover, offences like fraud and Ponzi schemes, which are prevalent in the global DAM, have not been defined, declared, and made punishable.

Speculation is one of the major concerns among developing nations regarding the supervision of the DAM, but that has not been adequately dealt with. Regulation of actors such as licensees, issuers, and sponsors is a major focus of the law; however, market behaviour and behavioural finance have not been considered within the market. A nation such as Pakistan,

which comprises a majority of the population that is not literate and unaware of the hazards of speculative activities, needs protection from such markets. This protection is not evident in this law.

Shariah governance and need for reform

The inclusion of Shariah governance is a timely insertion, given that the State Bank is actively seeking to convert the entire banking system in Pakistan into Shariah-compliant banks. However, there is a need to add clarity and detailed rules about what would constitute Shariah-compliant digital assets.

Finally, Pakistan's VAA 2026 is quite different from the European Union (EU), UK, US, and India frameworks. DAM regulatory frameworks in all these jurisdictions are known to achieve various objectives. Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation, enacted in the EU, is the most comprehensive law that provides an exclusively dedicated statute to regulate the digital assets market.

US law is focused on the regulation of the structure of digital assets with fragmented regulators, whereas the UK's Financial Conduct Authority has accommodated the digital assets market within its existing framework of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. India has largely dedicated its regulations to control anti-money laundering activities and promote taxation of the digital assets market.

A comparative analysis will be helpful to identify and include changes in the VAA 2026 to make it comprehensive.

While the Virtual Assets Act 2026 represents a significant step towards the formal recognition and regulation of the DAM in Pakistan, it reflects an imbalance between entry regulation and market conduct regulation.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that more mature jurisdictions have moved beyond licensing models to incorporate detailed conduct rules, investor protection mechanisms, and market abuse regimes. In contrast, the VAA 2026 remains primarily compliance-oriented, with limited engagement with the behavioural and systemic risks inherent in digital asset markets.

Therefore, while the Act provides a strong foundational framework, its long-term effectiveness will depend on its evolution towards comprehensive market regulation. This would require clearer rules on market conduct, enhanced investor protection measures, greater doctrinal clarity on Shariah-compliant digital assets, and stronger mechanisms to address speculative risks.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 1, 2026

Militant violence surged 27pc in May: PICSS



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

- **Country records 128 attacks in May, compared to 101 in April**
- **Civilian deaths up by 92pc; casualties of security personnel increase by 143pc**
- **Six suicide attacks witnessed, compared with one each in March and April**
- **Balochistan emerges as worst-affected province once again**

ISLAMABAD: After two consecutive months of improvement, Pakistan's security situation deteriorated sharply in May 2026, driven primarily by escalating terrorist violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, according to the monthly security assessment released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

The latest findings by PICSS suggest that militant and terror groups regained momentum during May after a brief period of relative decline, particularly in KP and Balochistan. The sharp increase in attacks, casualties, suicide bombings and kidnappings indicates that security challenges remain acute despite sustained counterterrorism efforts by the state.

According to the report, the country witnessed 128 terrorist attacks during May, compared to 101 attacks in April, representing a 27 per cent increase. The rise reversed the downward trend observed during the previous two months and underscored the persistent security challenges confronting conflict-affected regions of the country.

The increase in militant violence resulted in significantly higher casualties. During May, 71 civilians, 68 security personnel and six members of peace committees were killed, while 147 civilians, 35 security personnel and three peace committee members were injured. Compared to April, civilian fatalities increased from 37 to 71, representing a 92 per cent rise, while security personnel fatalities surged from 28 to 68, marking a 143pc increase.

One of the most alarming developments highlighted in the report was the sharp increase in suicide attacks. The country witnessed six suicide attacks during May, including four vehicle-borne suicide bombings. These attacks alone resulted in the deaths of 34 security personnel and nine civilians. In comparison, only one suicide attack was recorded in each of March and April, indicating a significant escalation in the use of suicide bombings by terrorist groups.

Balochistan emerged as the most affected province during the month. The province recorded 71 terrorist attacks, compared with 34 in April, representing a 109pc increase. The deteriorating security situation was further reflected in a surge in kidnappings. Of the 54 abductions reported nationwide during May, 52 occurred in Balochistan alone, highlighting the growing operational reach and confidence of militant groups in the province.

Despite the increase in terrorist activity, security forces intensified counterterrorism operations across the country. According to PICSS records, security forces killed 270 militants and arrested 15 others during the month. Of those killed, 128 were eliminated in the erstwhile Fata districts, 62 in mainland KP, 71 in Balochistan and one in Punjab.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 2, 2026

New internal security policy to centralise police operations



- **Proposals seek integration of crime data at national level, interprovincial intelligence sharing, CTD for GB**
- **Interior ministry seeks input from all provincial police chiefs ahead of key meeting**
- **FIA DG underscores need for uniform mechanism across provinces, notes ‘serious disconnect’ between different agencies**

LAHORE: The federal government has sought input from all police departments on a new internal security policy for the next five years, which aims to centralise police operations, improve interprovincial intelligence sharing, integrate crime data, and choke terror financing, among other measures. The National Internal Security Policy 2026-30, which will be discussed at an ‘extraordinary meeting’ of the National Police Management Board (NPMB) later this month, will include inputs from all provincial IGPs as well as the police chiefs of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The interior ministry shared a set of proposals, furnished by some retired and serving police officers, with the police chiefs along with the agenda to be discussed at the NPMB meeting that will be held under the aegis of the National Police Bureau (NPB). The NPB, which is led by FIA chief Dr Usman Anwar, is going to assume a greater role in future in devising national

reforms and strategies for all police departments. The new policy is significant in light of the visit by the Chief of Defence Force Field Marshal Asim Munir to the National Police Academy in January 2026, where he emphasised that “a strong, professional, and people-centric police force” was indispensable for internal security and the rule of law. Dawn learnt that the security establishment has extended full support to the civil law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for “showing no compromise in making the internal security impregnable”.

‘Enhanced role of NPB’

According to the documents shared with Dawn, certain former IGPs and serving officers contributed to the proposals that sought to enhance the role of the NPB in restructuring the police functions across the country. Some important issues include raising a Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in Gilgit-Baltistan, integration of police data at the national level, and centralisation of the International Driving Permit. NPB and FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwar has been made the convener of the upcoming NPMB meeting. Talking to Dawn, he said that there was a “serious disconnect” between various civil LEAs and similarly, many emerging policing challenges needed to be addressed before it was too late.

“It is a dire need of the time to establish a uniform mechanism across provinces and collaborate with international and domestic intelligence agencies to fight terrorism and choke terrorist financing,” Dr Usman said. He said the heads of the police organisations have been officially asked to submit their actionable points to be made part of the agenda for the upcoming meeting. A focal person (BS 20 officer) has been designated by the interior ministry for coordination with the provinces in this respect, he added. “The upcoming meeting shall also deliberate upon the functional specialisation, police welfare, transnational crimes, criminal data integration, training needs assessment, women police networking, interprovincial intelligence sharing, and development of CTD in GB,” he said.

Meanwhile, former NPB DG Tariq Khosa suggested that the existing National Security Policy was going to be completed in 2026. “We should come up with recommendations on a new national internal security policy 2026-30,” he said. He added that a steering committee headed by NPB should be notified by the interior ministry to furnish recommendations for the standardisation of firearms legislation. Khosa also proposed that a National Criminal Record Access System be developed to integrate police data at the national level.

He further suggested that the NPB should act as ‘PHQ’ (Police Headquarters) for the “Pakistan police” like the GHQ is for the Pakistan Army. “In addition to sufficient annual budgetary allocations for NPB, a special allocation of budget (Rs30 million) should be requested from the government,” the former NPB DG said. A retired senior officer said multiple areas in police administration over the years exposed structural fault lines impeding the overall performance of the police department in Pakistan. He said the capacity of the police in countering terrorism, insurgencies, and traditional and emerging crimes was “dismal”. The officer claimed that the move made by the NPB seemed to be the continuation of the policy layout of the ‘hard state’.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 4, 2026

Pakistan at the crossroads of a new mineral war

KAMRAN YOUSAF

For decades, global power struggles were defined by oil - but a quieter, more complex contest is now unfolding, one that may prove even more consequential for the 21st century. The new battleground is rare earth minerals and critical resources that sit at the heart of modern technology, defence systems and the global digital economy.

These minerals, ranging from lithium and graphite to rare earth elements, are essential inputs for electric vehicles, semiconductors, smartphones, satellites, missile systems and artificial intelligence infrastructure. They have almost become the invisible backbone of modern industrial and military power.

That is precisely why Washington is increasingly sounding the alarm.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has warned lawmakers that China's dominance of global critical mineral supply chains represents a serious strategic vulnerability for the wider international system. He claims no single source should be relied on for nearly 90 per cent of materials that underpin defence production, advanced technology and industrial manufacturing.

The numbers behind that warning are difficult to ignore. Over the past two decades, China has established near-dominant control over global rare earth processing capacity. While mining is geographically diversified, the real choke point lies in refining and separation, areas where China commands an overwhelming share of global output. As a result, minerals extracted in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia often pass through Chinese processing facilities before entering global supply chains. This is why Washington now has a broader strategy to diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on Chinese infrastructure.

Practically, critical minerals have moved from the margins of policy debate to the core of US foreign policy. Washington is now actively engaging dozens of countries, encouraging exploration, investment and joint ventures aimed at building alternative sources of both raw materials and processing capacity. The objective is strategic resilience.

It is within this evolving global contest that Pakistan is beginning to attract attention. Geologically, Pakistan is believed to hold significant untapped mineral potential from copper and gold deposits in Balochistan to lithium prospects and rare earth-related resources in other regions. One project, Reko Diq, is widely considered as one of the largest undeveloped copper and gold deposits in the world, and already the subject of renewed international interest.

Estimates from Pakistan's geological institutions suggest the country possesses substantial reserves of strategic minerals. Although the absence of comprehensive exploration and modern mapping is both a challenge and an opportunity.

For the US and its partners, Pakistan's mineral potential fits into a broader effort to build alternative supply chains outside China's control. Over the past year, diplomatic engagement has increased, with American and Western stakeholders expressing interest in Pakistan's mining sector and its long-term role in global critical mineral markets - but this comes with clear geopolitical implications.

China remains its closest strategic partner, deeply embedded through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and decades of economic and defence cooperation. At the same time, the US is actively seeking to reduce China's leverage in precisely the sector where Pakistan's future mineral wealth is now being discussed.

This places Islamabad in a difficult strategic position.

Can Pakistan convert its mineral potential into economic opportunity without disrupting its long-standing relationship with China? And as US-China competition intensifies, will it eventually face pressure to lean in one direction?

Perhaps more importantly: if critical minerals eventually become the defining resource of global power, where exactly will Pakistan choose to position itself in that emerging order?

For now, there are no clear answers, but the questions themselves are becoming increasingly unavoidable.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 8, 2026

FIA establishes FATF desks across all zones to improve implementation of international investigation standards

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has established Financial Action Task Force (FATF) desks across all its wings and zones by expanding the existing FATF secretariat at the Anti-Money Laundering Directorate, as part of the country's upcoming evaluation by the global anti-money laundering watchdog next year.

The move is intended to improve the effective implementation of international standards with regard to investigations into money laundering, terrorism financing and predicate offences.

"This significant step will also improve the quality of investigations and prosecutions, data maintenance, timely generation of international cooperation requests, prompt inter-agency coordination and effective feedback mechanisms," a senior FIA official told Dawn on Tuesday.

According to the official, FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwar has instructed all zones and specialised wings to set up FATF desks within seven days, to ensure full compliance with international standards and avoid any deficiencies during the country's assessment, expected in the last quarter of 2027.

The FIA chief has also directed that each desk be headed by an officer of at least Assistant Director rank.

Pakistan was put on the enhanced monitoring list (grey list) in August 2018 by FATF. After demonstrating significant improvement against a 27-point action plan regarding technical compliance and effectiveness, it was removed from the grey list in October 2022.

The country's exit from the grey list helped improve its standing with international financial watchdogs and investor confidence. It also supported broader economic engagements, including negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"Domestically, it also improved the effectiveness of regulations, law enforcement and capacity of regulators and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in CFT and money laundering," the official said.

The official said in 2021, the FATF secretariat was established at the Anti-Money Laundering Directorate of FIA headquarters to implement FATF standards effectively and to remove major shortcomings highlighted in the 27-point action plan.

“With the passage of time and owing to an increase in volume and emerging trends in investigations of predicate offences, anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism (CFT), it was inevitable to expand the existing framework,” he said.

The newly established desks include seven units – the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), the Investigation Monitoring Unit (IMU), the International Cooperation Unit (ICU), the Inter-Agency Coordination Unit (IACU), the Risk Assessment Unit (RAU), the Seizure and Confiscation Unit (SCU) and the Forensics and Virtual Assets Unit (FVAU).

Each zonal desk will be reporting to a desk at the concerned wing of the FIA headquarters.

The FIU plays a particularly important role as it receives financial intelligence from the FMU, disseminates it to concerned zones for investigation, and provides feedback to the FMU.

The ICU facilitates the sending and receiving of international cooperation requests through formal and informal channels for assistance from foreign jurisdictions in cases involving money laundering, terrorism financing and predicate offences. Assistance includes the collection of evidence, seizure and confiscation of foreign proceeds, and the arrest of absconding accused persons.

The IMU monitors the effectiveness and quality of ongoing investigations by providing guidance to investigators and prosecutors, while the IACU ensures prompt assistance to investigators by providing information and evidence from other LEAs, regulators and authorities such as NADRA, the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, excise departments, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) (Income Tax).

The RAU is mandated to conduct periodic risk assessments of various sectors, geographical regions and offences under its domain. This exercise will ultimately feed into Pakistan’s National Risk Assessment, according to the official.

The SCU will ensure seizure and confiscation during money laundering and terrorism financing investigations, while also maintaining a database of seizures and confiscations carried out by the FIA.

Meanwhile, the FVAU has been established as a proactive approach to meet the needs of investigations, including digital equipment, the use of cyberspace in the commission of conventional crimes, and virtual assets as a channel for the movement of illegal proceeds and as a placement, layering and integration platform.

“Each zone will also maintain an official digital wallet for the safe custody of seizure and confiscation of virtual assets,” the official said.

He added that since Pakistan’s removal from the grey list, key institutions – including designated LEAs, the FIA, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), the National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency (NCCIA), FBR Customs and FBR Inland Revenue, regulators of the financial sector, and Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs) – had continued efforts to ensure compliance with FATF standards on an ongoing basis.

He further said the authorities had sustained measures against cross-border cash smuggling, improved Know Your Customer (KYC) and Customer Due Diligence (CDD) processes for financial transactions, and tightened oversight of DNFBPs such as real estate agents, dealers in precious metals and stones, accountants and lawyers.

During the period of grey-listing, Pakistan also showed significant progress in the counter-terror financing regime by taking action against proscribed individuals and organisations and their associated networks, seizing properties, freezing bank accounts, and prosecuting individuals involved in terror-financing activities.

“The National Counter-Terrorism Authority (Nacta), CTDs, the FIA, provincial home departments, district intelligence committees, police, intelligence agencies and other authorities played a pivotal role through synergised efforts in removing major shortcomings and developing a sustainable and effective countering and monitoring regime for the financing of terrorism,” another official said.

He added that the expansion of FATF desks and specialised units reflected FIA’s continued efforts to maintain compliance ahead of the next mutual evaluation and avoid any risk of renewed scrutiny by the global watchdog.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 9, 2026

Pakistan unveils first-ever State of Freedom Report-2026



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan marked a significant milestone in governance research and public policy with the launch of the country's first-ever State of Freedom Report - Pakistan 2026, a comprehensive national assessment examining political, civil, economic, digital, legal and social freedoms.

Developed by Mishal Pakistan, the Country Partner Institute of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Pakistan, the report established the country's first evidence-based national benchmark for measuring freedom, public trust, institutional performance, citizen empowerment and governance outcomes, said a press release.

The report was launched at the ISSI in collaboration with the China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC). The event brought together senior government officials, parliamentarians, members of the diplomatic corps, academics, media professionals, civil society representatives and policy experts. Barrister Aqeel Malik, Minister of State for Law and Justice, attended as Chief Guest. Presenting the report, Amir Jahangir, Co-Author of the Freedom Report 2026 and Chief Executive Officer of Mishal Pakistan, described the publication as a historic milestone in Pakistan's governance and policy landscape.

Puruesh Chaudhary, Co-Author of the report and a governance expert, emphasized the importance of citizen trust, inclusion and future readiness.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 16, 2026

UN says 2.4m refugees need resettling in 2027

GENEVA: Almost 2.4 million refugees will need resettling next year, the United Nations said on Tuesday, at a time when a number of countries have slashed resettlement spots.

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, warned of a dire shortage of options for such refugees, who cannot return home and face risks in their country of asylum.

“Expanding resettlement is urgent and achievable,” Jackie Keegan, who leads UNHCR’s durable solutions and field protection support service, told journalists in Geneva.

“Increased quotas, bringing more countries on board, and accelerating processing will ensure this life-saving tool reaches more of those in need.” In its annual Projected Global Resettlement Needs report, UNHCR said 2.37 million people from 43 countries of origin and living in 76 countries of asylum would need resettling elsewhere next year.

Afghan refugees are the largest group in need of resettlement, followed by people from South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, living in vast camps in Bangladesh. The 2.4 million figure is down six percent from last year’s report.

Keegan said this was partially due to Afghans returning from Iran and Pakistan “under adverse circumstances” and the overthrow of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 opening the way for voluntary returns.

In 2025, only around 37,000 refugees left for a new country through UNHCR-assisted resettlement. That figure was down from 116,000 in 2024.

Part of that decline was linked to the United States — long the world’s biggest resettler of refugees which slammed its doors shut shortly after President Donald Trump returned to the White House last year.

Keegan stressed though that it was “not just the US”, with other long-term resettlement countries having “either dropped their quota or have suspended”. “Recommitting to protection and solutions is more critical than ever,” she said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 17, 2026

Pakistan, UK agree to expand cooperation on counterterrorism, illegal migration



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United Kingdom on Wednesday agreed to enhance cooperation in counterterrorism, combating illegal migration and human smuggling, institutional collaboration and police training.

The understanding was reached as Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met British Minister of State for the Middle East, South Asia and the UN Hamish Falconer. According to the interior ministry, Falconer appreciated Pakistan's "positive and significant" role in facilitating the US-Iran peace deal.

"Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir played a historic role for peace," it quoted Falconer as saying. "The US-Iran peace deal has projected Pakistan as a flag-bearer of global peace," he added.

According to the statement, the two leaders also agreed on "enhancing cooperation between the two countries in various fields, including counterterrorism, combating illegal migration, institutional collaboration, and police training". "Positive results are emerging from the UPSCALE Project and the capacity of Pakistani institutions has improved significantly," the ministry quoted Naqvi as saying.

During the meeting, the interior minister assured that "indiscriminate action was being taken against illegal migration and human smuggling in Pakistan," it stated. Meanwhile, the two

leaders also discussed Pakistan-UK relations and the overall regional situation, the ministry said.

“Naqvi reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to further strengthening relations with the UK,” the statement said. “Both leaders agreed to work together to address the issue of fake student visas,” the statement said.

“Naqvi also emphasised that several terrorist organisations were operating from Afghanistan, and the Afghan government must prevent its territory from being used against Pakistan,” the ministry said.

In a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar earlier this week, Falconer had acknowledged that Pakistan has the right under international law to defend itself against attacks originating from Afghanistan.

A day earlier, he had also announced an additional £8 million to support joint UK-Pakistan efforts to combat crime and illegal migration.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 17, 2026

Inside the new face of Baloch militancy

BY NAVEED HUSSAIN



KARACHI: Historically, militant groups involved women in support roles, such as logistics, intelligence gathering, or propaganda. These roles were largely shaped by entrenched gender norms and the perception that women were less likely to engage in direct violence. That pattern, however, has changed dramatically. Over the past few decades, the use of women by violent groups has shifted from symbolic roles to, in some cases, direct participation in combat operations, including suicide missions.

Towards the end of the 20th century, militant groups began to recognise the tactical advantages of deploying women. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – the organisation that waged a deadly separatist insurgency in Sri Lanka until its military defeat in 2009 – was among the earliest groups to normalise the use of female bombers as early as the 1980s and 1990s.

“

The use of female suicide bombers is not primarily ideological; it is strategic. Women can provide operational advantages because they are often viewed differently by security agencies and the public

Manzar Zaidi

“One of the earliest examples was the LTTE. A female Tamil suicide bomber, Dhanu (real name Thenmozhi Rajaratnam), carried out the assassination of then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991,” says terrorism and security expert Dr Manzar Zaidi. Women were also deployed during the Palestinian Intifada in operational roles, including suicide missions, indicating that they were not merely passive supporters but active combatants, he adds.

By the 2000s, the strategy caught the attention of militant organisations worldwide. Groups like Chechen separatists, especially the “Black Widows”, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) increasingly used women for suicide operations.



Globally, women accounted for about 15% of all suicide bombers over the past four decades. The recent rise in their involvement in BLA-linked attacks is therefore significant

Aftab Shah

Boko Haram, in particular, institutionalised the use of female suicide bombers, including abducted girls. “Many women were abducted, abused, and forcibly recruited. Trauma and coercion played a central role,” says forensic psychologist Aftab Shah.

Motivations, according to him, varied widely, including revenge, personal loss, ideology, or perceived honour. “In Chechnya, women who lost family members joined militant groups seeking retribution. Others were driven by identity, redemption, or grievance narratives.”

This global shift is now increasingly visible in Balochistan, where security officials say militant groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and its affiliates have begun systematically involving women in propaganda and operational roles.



The BLA has used videos in local languages to target young audiences, particularly women

Fahad Nabeel

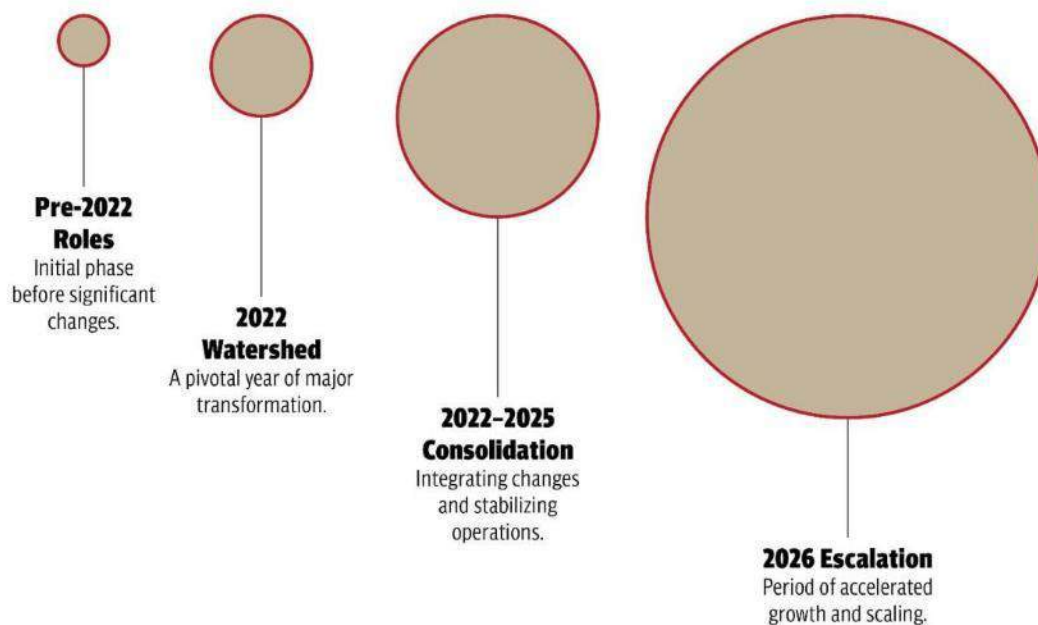
“The BLA has used videos in local languages to target young audiences, particularly women,” says cyber security expert Fahad Nabeel. “It uses propaganda techniques that normalise its narrative and portray militants as ordinary individuals engaged in resistance.”

The BLA, designated as a terrorist organisation by Pakistan, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, the European Union, and Iran, has evolved from hit-and-run guerrilla tactics to more coordinated and high-profile attacks, including suicide operations.

Escalation Timeline:

Female deployment in Baloch military

The female involvement in BLA operations represents a measurable and accelerating escalation. The 2022 Karachi University bombing marked a watershed, but the pattern has intensified sharply through 2025–2026, reflecting a conscious doctrinal embedding of women into militant operational frameworks.



The four-phases illustrates that the weaponization of women is not a series of isolated incidents but a sustained, deliberate, and accelerating operational doctrine. Each phase builds on the previous, demonstrating institutional learning and strategic intent within BLA command structures.

Empowerment or manipulation?

Security analysts have observed a visible shift since 2022. “Globally, women accounted for about 15% of all suicide bombers over the past four decades. The recent rise in their involvement in BLA-linked attacks is therefore significant,” says Shah.

The BLA, experts say, is expanding its recruitment of women to broaden its reach while simultaneously evading detection. The reality of manipulation and exploitation that underlies women’s recruitment is often concealed by their portrayal as symbols of “resistance.”

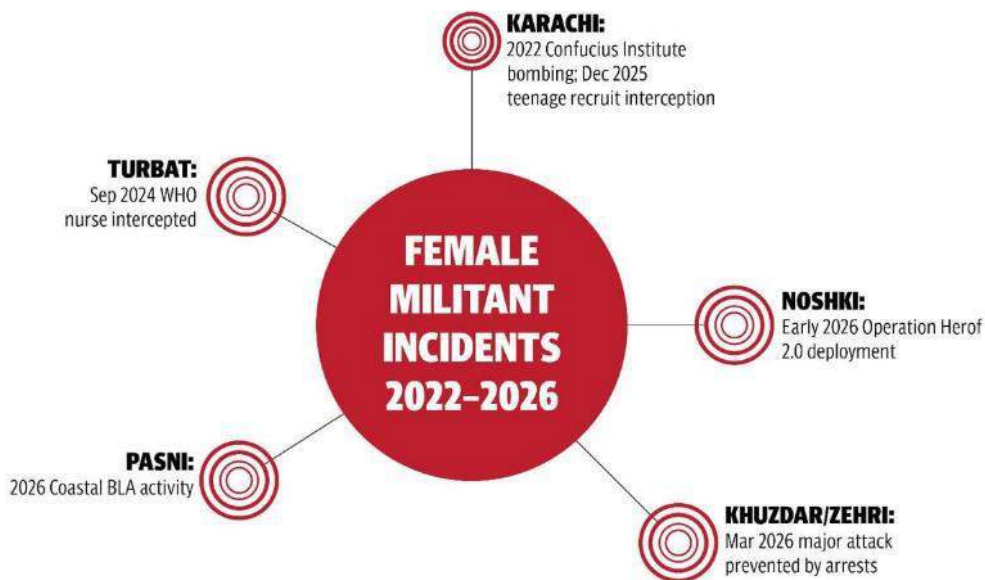
The BLA tries to project women’s participation as empowerment but it is, in reality, a calculated system of coercion, psychological manipulation, and operational exploitation. “The evidence points overwhelmingly to exploitation rather than empowerment. Groups like the BLA are weaponising societal assumptions that women are harmless, exploiting the likelihood that security personnel are less inclined to perceive them as threats,” says Shah.

“ Women were often perceived as less suspicious by security forces at checkpoints. At the same time, their participation in violent attacks attracts media attention, amplifying visibility of such incidents

The leadership structures of these groups, according to him, are male-dominated, with women rarely seen in positions of authority. Instead, they are largely used as instruments to further organisational objectives – expected to die for the cause, but never allowed to lead it.

Militant groups radicalise women – often educated yet socially or emotionally vulnerable – through ideological grooming, personal grievances, or digital propaganda ecosystems. This aligns with broader intelligence assessments in Pakistan, which suggest that women’s inclusion in BLA attacks is driven less by ideological transformation and more by tactical expediency.

Geographic Spread of Female Militant Activity: Balochistan & beyond



The geographic distribution of confirmed female-linked militant activity reveals a deliberate expansion strategy. Operations have spread from Turbat and interior Balochistan outward to the coast (Pasni), central districts (Khuzdar, Noshki), and major urban centers (Karachi) – reflecting BLA’s intent to establish a wider operational footprint rather than a geographically contained militancy.

Tactical advantages

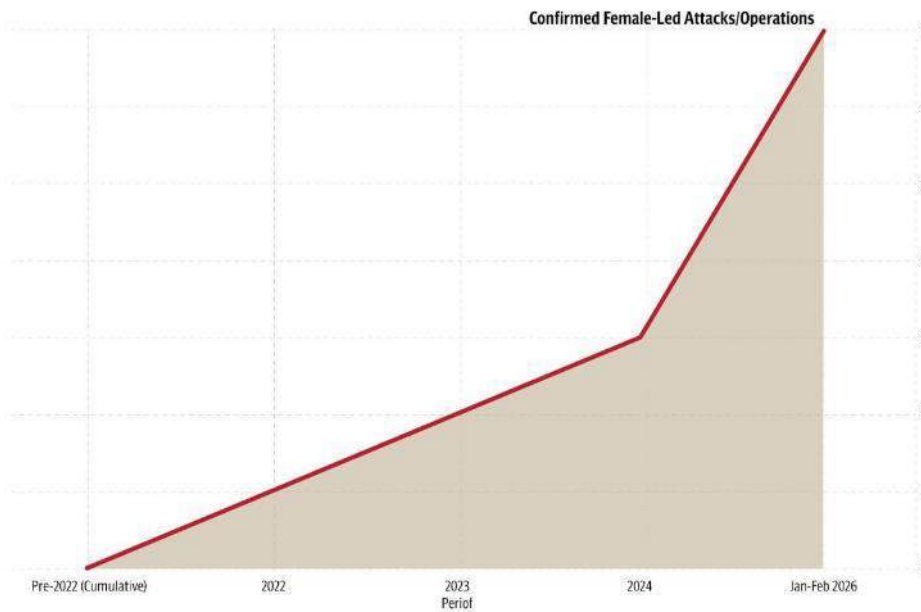
“The use of female suicide bombers is not primarily ideological; it is tactical. Women can provide operational advantages because they are often viewed differently by security agencies and the public,” says Dr Zaidi.

Shah agrees. “Security personnel and society at large tend to view women and children as non-combatants, creating a blind spot that militant groups exploit. Social expectations make women less likely to be suspected, while cultural norms can complicate physical searches. Clothing such as the abaya may also, in some cases, facilitate concealment,” he says.

There is also a propaganda dimension to this strategy. Female bombers, according to Shah, attract greater media attention by challenging societal expectations, producing a stronger psychological impact and wider coverage domestically and internationally. Militant groups may also use women’s participation to shame men into joining their cause.

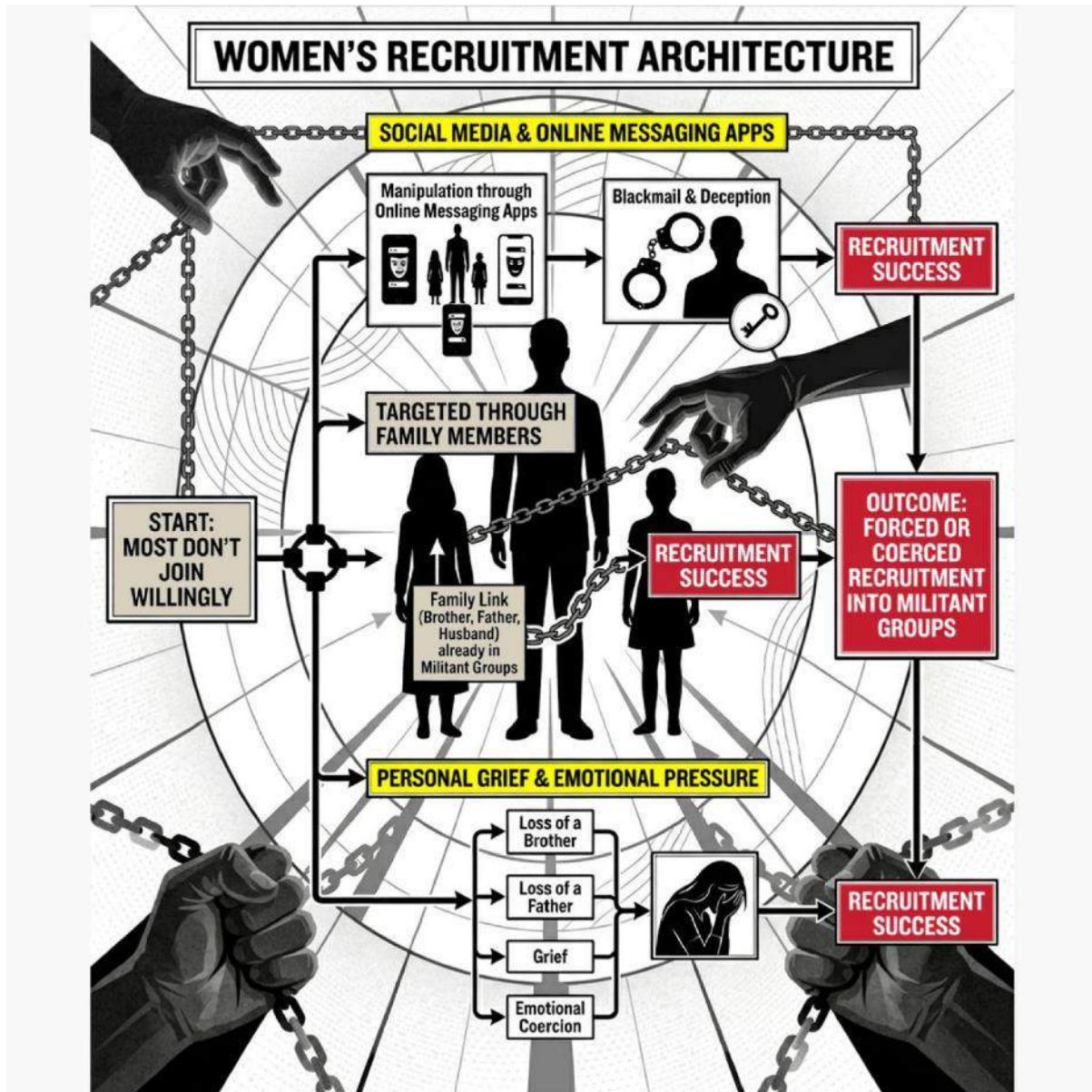
Defence analyst SM Hali, meanwhile, believes women’s recruitment by the BLA reflects both desperation and innovation. “Faced with sustained pressure from security forces and disruption of traditional networks, the group appears to be seeking alternative operational methods. At the same time, it can be seen as an innovation, exploiting the specific operational advantages and tactical niche that women may provide,” he says.

Frequency of Female-Led Attacks : A Quantitative Escalation



Turning point in strategy

The April 2022 suicide bombing by a young mother, Shari Baloch, at Karachi University's Confucius Institute was a turning point in the evolution of female militancy within BLA. The deadly attack shattered long-standing assumptions about gender roles in militant operations and triggered a reassessment among security analysts and policymakers.



The targeting of Chinese nationals struck at the symbolic core of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with the dual objective of straining Sino-Pak ties and demonstrating the group's ability to penetrate high-security urban environments. The BLA amplified Shari's image through propaganda, portraying her as a "martyr" in an attempt to motivate more women to join the fight.

The strategy appears to have worked, with security agencies observing a dramatic rise in women's involvement in BLA operations since then. Between 2022 and 2025, several women, including Sumaiya, Mahikan, Mahal, and Zareena, were linked to suicide attacks. The trend

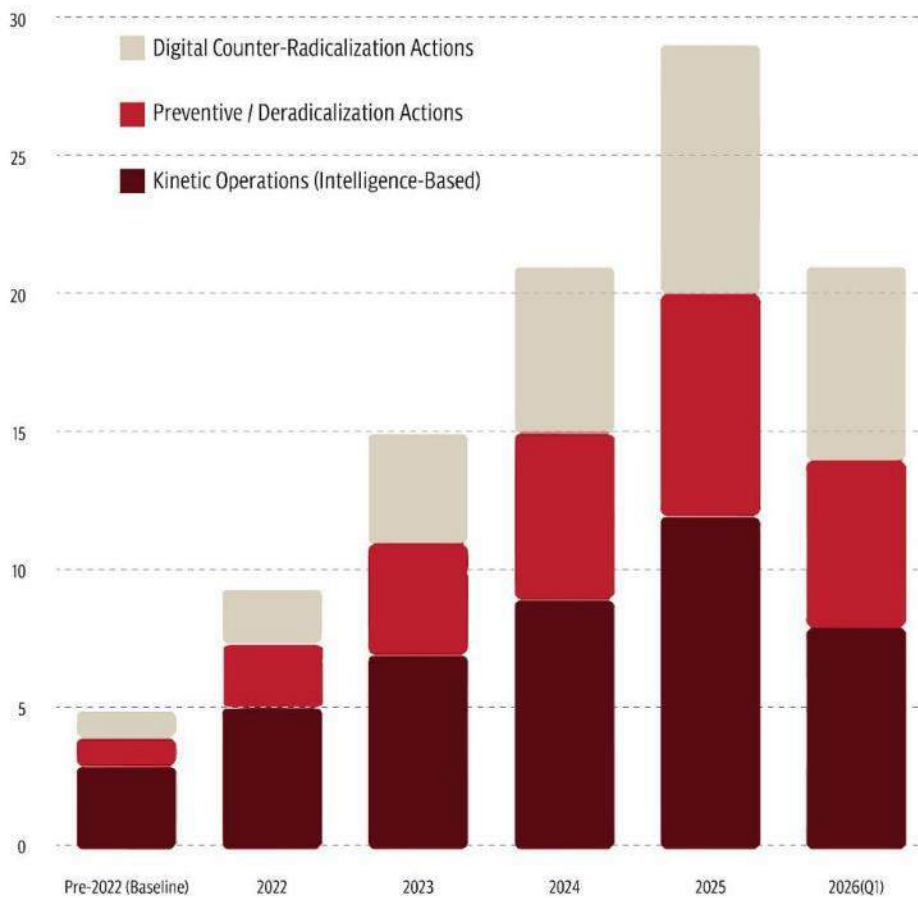
escalated in early 2026 with a coordinated series involving six female operatives. Five were killed in security operations, while one, identified as Dur Jan Baloch of the BLA’s Fateh Squad, survived. Officials say the pattern points to a broader operational shift within the militant network.

OSINT indicates a more structured integration of women in the BLA’s “Operation Herof 2.0” in 2026, with women deployed in multiple districts in synchronised attacks. Operatives, including Hawa Baloch, Yasma Baloch, Asifa Mengal, Maryam Buzdar, and Hatam Naz, were central to high-value strikes on security installations, reflecting a systematic use of women in recruitment, planning, and high-risk operations.

Recruitment beyond stereotypes

According to security assessments, most female recruits come from younger and more vulnerable demographic groups. This perception has been reinforced by confessions of young girls arrested by security forces as they spoke of coercion and deception in recruitment.

Counter-Terrorism Capability Development: A Quantitative View



On Sept 25, 2024, a young nurse Adeela Baloch, previously associated with WHO and Turbat Teaching Hospital, stated that she had been “misguided by terrorists” into “volunteering” for a suicide mission before being intercepted by security forces. Her confession pointed to psychological manipulation, emotional exploitation, and coercion tactics used by militant handlers.

Adeela was not an isolated case. In mid-March 2026, a planned attack was foiled in Khuzdar with the arrest of a 19-year-old would-be bomber, identified as Laiba, alias Farzana. She later publicly confessed to being radicalised and pressured into militancy, and said she had also been instructed to recruit other women. Another would-be bomber, Khair-un-Nisa from Turbat, was arrested while en route to Islamabad. By her own admission, she had been coerced by a relative into joining the BLA.

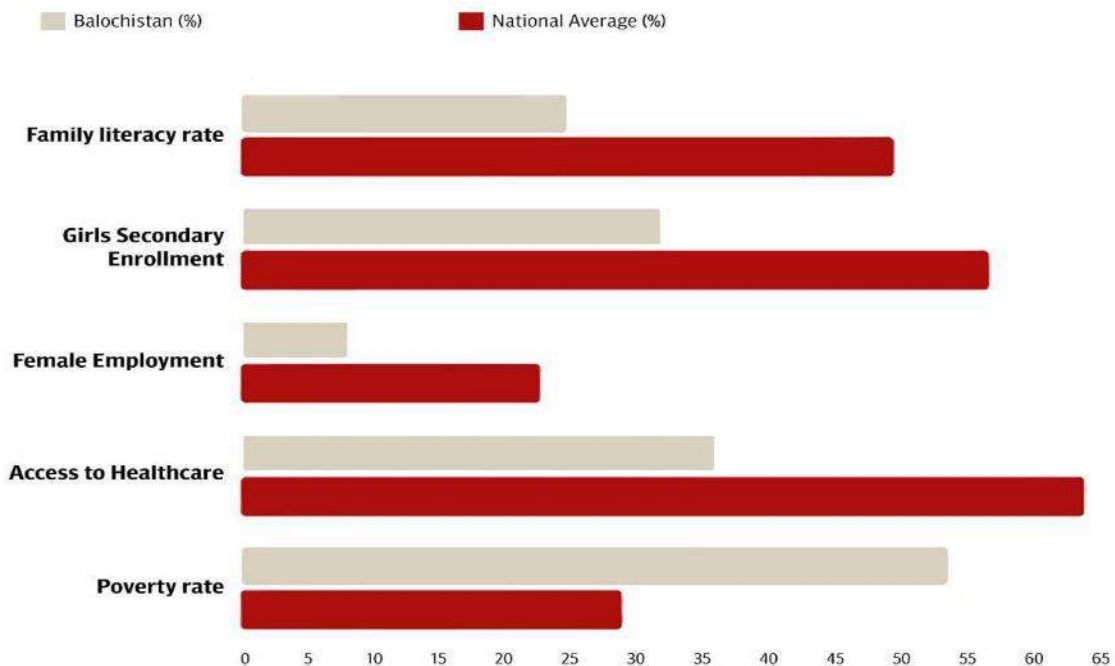
However, sweeping generalisations would be misleading, as exceptions may exist. Several women recruited by the BLA are from urban backgrounds. They are often educated. And they are not necessarily ‘misled’ in simplistic terms; rather, they may be influenced through psychological conditioning, ideological framing, or, in some cases, incentives that encourage participation in suicide operations.

Motivations for violence

Experts suggest there may be several motivations behind a woman’s decision to embrace violence. “Women may be recruited into violent roles by framing participation as a source of purpose, honour, or elevated status, including notions of heroism or martyrdom,” says Hali.

Socio-Economic Indicators:

Balochistan’s Development Deficit



“In some cases, personal grievances – such as the loss of a family member in security operations – may be exploited or reframed to encourage involvement in militancy. Others may be drawn in through promises of recognition and importance, which can have a strong psychological pull and, in certain cases, lead to suicide attacks,” he adds.

Psychologist Shah adopts a broader political and ideological lens to explain the phenomenon. “The situation in Balochistan closely resembles cases seen among the Tamil Tigers or Kurdish militants in Turkey. These cases often involve educated, middle-class women rather than vulnerable or traumatised individuals,” he adds.

“In such situations, identity fusion with the group becomes important. Individuals begin to see the group's grievances as their own. Genuine grievances may exist, but militant organisations exploit and weaponise them.”

Research also identifies revenge as a major driver. In conflicts such as Chechnya, women who lost husbands, fathers, or brothers became known as “Black Widows” and joined militant campaigns seeking retribution. Other motivations can include personal loss, honour, redemption, reputation, or a desire to correct perceived injustices.

Online recruitment

Now, the key question is how the BLA or its affiliates manage to recruit women in a conservative society like Balochistan, where female mobility is restricted and interaction with non-family men remains a taboo. The answer increasingly points to social media.

Online platforms originally designed to connect people have increasingly been repurposed as tools for propaganda, manipulation and radicalisation. Where militant groups once relied on physical training camps, much of their operational activity has now shifted online – from recruitment and fundraising to psychological warfare and operational messaging. Experts call it “digital terrorism.”



According to security assessments, most female recruits come from younger and more vulnerable demographic groups. This perception was further reinforced by confessions of young girls arrested by security forces as they spoke of coercion and deception in recruitment

“Militant groups have effectively used social media platforms for years to reach young people, particularly young women. These platforms are used not only to target vulnerable individuals but also to recruit them by exposing them to extremist narratives,” says cyber security expert Nabeel. The expansion of the digital era has dramatically increased the use of online platforms as tools of radicalisation.

The use of digital terrorism was more systematic in the case of ISIS, which became the first militant group to weaponise social media at an unprecedented scale. Between 2014 and 2019,

the ultra-extremist group leveraged platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, YouTube and encrypted apps to enlist thousands of recruits from across the world.

“ISIS established the Al-Khanssaa Brigade, a women’s division that actively recruited and indoctrinated women online from around the world,” says Dr Zaidi. “Women from countries such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, and France travelled to Syria after first encountering ISIS propaganda online. Numerous documented cases show that their initial contact with the organisation occurred through digital platforms.”

Baloch militant groups appear to have adapted similar tactics. Officials say the BLA, in particular, is using digital platforms to amplify its narrative, radicalise and recruit youth, and rapidly publicise its attacks, reflecting a broader shift towards tech-enabled insurgency.

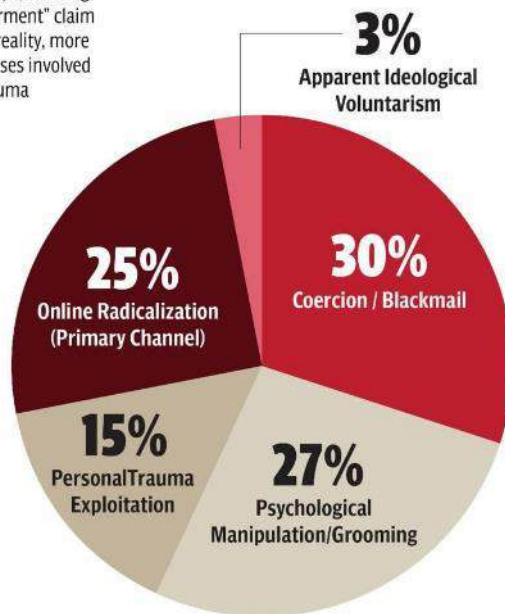
Explaining the modus operandi, Nabeel says militant groups, such as BLA, follow a multi-layered recruitment strategy. It typically begins with the use of popular social media platforms to disseminate propaganda and identify individuals who appear sympathetic to their cause.

“Once potential recruits are identified, they are encouraged to move into private chats and encrypted messaging platforms. These platforms provide anonymity, making it easier to engage vulnerable individuals while making detection more difficult for law enforcement and intelligence agencies,” he adds. “Case studies show that individuals have become fully radicalised online without ever meeting a member of a militant group in person.”

The Propaganda vs. Reality Gap:

A Quantified View

This chart breaks down the real reasons women joined militant groups, showing that BLA’s “female empowerment” claim is overwhelmingly false. In reality, more than 95% of documented cases involved coercion, manipulation, trauma exploitation, or grooming.



Confronting the challenge

The stereotypical portrayal of women as passive observers creates opportunities for terrorist organisations to use women as tactical and operational assets. Dr Zaidi says counterterrorism agencies must recognise that women are part of the global terrorism landscape. “For too long, security and law enforcement agencies have had a blind spot regarding the role of women in extremist organisations,” he says. “Counterterrorism efforts must expand their focus. At the same time, he says authorities need to understand why women are joining these organisations, identify the narratives being used to radicalise them, and determine whether there are specialised recruitment campaigns targeting women.

From a cybersecurity perspective, it is extremely difficult to identify the entire online ecosystem through which militant groups recruit. Terrorist organisations generate propaganda directly, while supporters and sympathisers further amplify that content across multiple platforms. This makes it difficult to track every piece of extremist material and develop effective counter-narratives. “A further complication is the lack of content moderators familiar with local languages such as Balochi and Pashto. This allows extremist groups to spread propaganda more easily on major platforms,” says Nabeel. “One example is the BLA's use of keyword obfuscation on TikTok, which allows propaganda videos to bypass moderation systems and reach wider audiences.” He recommends the government invest heavily in digital literacy programs so that people can recognise extremist propaganda and understand that such content is often misleading, manipulative, and designed to cause harm. “The government should work closely with civil society organisations to identify early signs of radicalisation, particularly among teenagers.” He further says that the government should strengthen cooperation with international technology platforms to identify extremist content in local languages. “A dedicated monitoring task force could help identify propaganda, develop counter-narratives, and coordinate with platforms to remove harmful content more effectively.”

The use of women by the BLA and its affiliates is not merely a tactical shift; it disrupts social norms and erodes community trust in the volatile province. Women joining violent networks risk generating suspicion and fear, where ordinary women may face increased scrutiny, social pressure, or restrictions on their mobility. Of particular concern is the potential reversal of gains in female education, economic participation, and public engagement achieved through sustained state efforts in the conservative society. Overall, the weaponisation of women in Baloch militancy reflects a troubling intersection of militant adaptation and societal vulnerability. By exploiting cultural norms, psychological manipulation, and digital propaganda, these networks promote a false narrative of empowerment. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive response that combines security measures with socio-economic development, counter-narratives, and stronger community resilience to ensure long-term stability and protection of vulnerable individuals.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 21, 2026

Sindh sets up panel to scrutinise criminal case challans



KARACHI: The Sindh government has constituted a special sub-committee to review and scrutinise challans in criminal cases, aiming to improve the quality and legal robustness of prosecution submissions before trial proceedings begin. The formal notification for the committee's formation was issued by the Sindh Law Department.

According to the notification, the 10-member committee will be headed by DIG Crime and Investigation Sindh Amir Farooqui. It includes DIG West Irfan Baloch, AIG Legal Ali Sher Jakhrani, Director Legal Anti-Corruption Muhammad Ashraf Soomro, and the Director General of the Narcotics Wing. The committee also comprises representatives from the Excise Department and senior officials from the Prosecution Department, ensuring cross-departmental coordination between law enforcement and legal prosecution bodies.

Officials said the committee will devise a structured mechanism and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the pre-trial scrutiny of challans submitted in criminal cases. The initiative is intended to strengthen case preparation and reduce legal and administrative shortcomings that often hinder prosecution. The body will also identify procedural and administrative bottlenecks in criminal cases and submit recommendations and reports to improve overall efficiency in the criminal justice process. The formation of the committee is part of broader efforts to enhance coordination among police, anti-corruption, excise and prosecution departments and ensure better case management at the pre-trial stage.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 22, 2026

UK to expand refugee sponsorship schemes

The UK interior ministry has announced it will create new legal routes for asylum seekers, including allowing community organisations to sponsor refugees based on a similar system in Canada.

The system will come into place later this year, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said, with organisations and some “trusted” universities able to sponsor refugees and first arrivals expected in autumn 2027.

A route for employers to sponsor refugees is also expected to open next year, the Home Office said in a press release.



Immigration and asylum are thorny issues in the UK, where the hard-right Reform UK party has rapidly grown in popularity, riding a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Keir Starmer, who stepped down as Prime Minister this week but will remain in power until his successor is chosen, has tried to appear tough on immigration since coming into power two years ago.

His government will next week introduce legislation in parliament tightening asylum rules, including making it easier to deport failed asylum seekers and restricting family reunion for refugees to immediate family members.

The immigration policies of his likely successor, Andy Burnham — who could replace Starmer as early as July — remain unclear, though he has acknowledged migration concerns in his recent campaign to become an MP.

It is also uncertain whether Mahmood, the straight-talking face of Starmer’s immigration crackdown, will remain in her post under the next prime minister.

“I will open new legal routes for genuine refugees, while closing loopholes that have been too often abused,” Mahmood said in a statement.

The new sponsorship scheme will “operate at a much higher capacity” than the UK Resettlement Scheme, which brought around 800 people in the year ending September 2025.

The Home Office did not detail how many refugees could benefit from the scheme, but said it would be “capped”.

Previous sponsorship schemes have been targeted at countries including resettlement for refugees from Syria or Afghanistan.

Earlier this year, Mahmood faced criticism from charities and within her own party over tough regulations, including making refugee status temporary and banning education visas for some countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar and Sudan.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 27, 2026

Cybercrime wave exposes online security gaps

MUHAMMAD ILYAS



LAHORE: As Pakistan's digital economy, online banking, and social media usage continue to expand, cybercrime has emerged as a major national challenge. In the first five months of this year, more than 77,000 cybercrime complaints were received by the relevant authorities, highlighting the growing scale of the problem.

According to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency, over 58,000 complaints were verified, more than 8,000 inquiries were launched, 457 cases were formally registered, and 520 suspects were arrested. However, the number of convictions remains low, leading many victims to question the effectiveness of the justice system.

Unfortunately, the majority of incidents go unreported. Shumaila, a victim of banking fraud, revealed that money was withdrawn from her husband's bank accounts through a scam. After making repeated visits to banks, she was discouraged by the prospect of repeatedly visiting cybercrime offices and eventually stopped pursuing the case.

Similarly, Khawaja Shoaib, another observer, highlighted another common scam. "People often receive calls from individuals posing as parcel delivery representatives who ask them to confirm a PIN code. Once the code is shared, victims can lose access to their WhatsApp accounts, which are then taken over by fraudsters," said Shoaib.

Victims claimed cybercrime causes not only financial losses but also severe emotional distress. A Lahore-based businessman, speaking anonymously, shared that he received a call from someone pretending to be a bank representative. Within minutes, large sums were withdrawn from his account. Although he filed a complaint immediately, recovering the money took months and he was still unable to recover the full amount.

Another woman from Lahore explained that her social media account was hacked and used to send messages requesting money from her friends and relatives. "The hacker sent messages in my name and deceived people," she said, adding that the incident caused her significant mental stress. Cybercrime expert Kaukab Zuberi highlighted that the most common cybercrimes reported in Pakistan include online financial fraud, WhatsApp and Facebook account hacking, fake investment schemes, online shopping scams, identity theft, and blackmail through social media, with women and young people increasingly being targeted.

According to Zuberi, a major reason for the rise in cybercrime is the lack of public awareness. Many people are unfamiliar with the tactics used by fraudsters and continue to click on suspicious links or share sensitive information therefore institutions must educate citizens about online risks and safe digital practices.

Zuberi also pointed to capacity issues within cybercrime enforcement agencies. "A large number of cases remain pending while there is a shortage of trained cybercrime specialists," said Zuberi, who called for the recruitment of skilled investigators and stronger public awareness campaigns through both mainstream and social media.

Cybersecurity experts believe most successful cybercrimes result from weak passwords, clicking suspicious links, sharing personal information with unknown individuals, and failing to use two-factor authentication. City-wise, Karachi records the highest number of cybercrime complaints, followed by Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, and Peshawar. Experts believe these cities are more heavily targeted because of their greater internet usage, mobile banking activity, and online commerce.

Zuberi emphasized that law enforcement alone cannot solve the problem.

"Digital security education in schools and universities, stronger security systems by banks and telecom companies, faster judicial action, and greater public vigilance are necessary. Citizens should avoid trusting unknown callers, suspicious links, or investment offers and should report suspicious activity immediately," said Zuberi. Experts warn that cybercrime is no longer just a technical issue but an economic, social and national security challenge. Despite successful operations against fraud networks and hacking groups, rising complaints show stronger action is needed from the government, private sector and the public.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JUNE 29, 2026

The ecology of civic spaces

MARVI MAZHAR

IN Karachi, development is often imagined as an upgrade in scale – a quiet residential zone becomes commercial chaos, and an informal, difficult-to-maintain civic place is replaced by a larger, safer, more manageable and programmable space. On paper, this looks like progress. In urban life, the equation is complicated. Cities, particularly in South Asia, have a habit of mistaking expansion for continuity. The expansion of a building means that public mission has grown. When a facility offers more amenities, such as rooms, equipment, parking and programming, it is seen as advancement. But civic spaces do not live by square footage alone. They live through democratic access, repetition, informality, memory and the possibility of arrival.

This is where the debate between preservation and development in Karachi needs to be rethought. Preservation is not only about old buildings, stone façades, carved balconies or colonial-era elevations. It is also about the preservation of relationships: between a place and its street, between a room and its regulars, between a threshold and the people who feel they can cross it without permission, and without an agenda. Development, likewise, is not automatically the enemy. Cities must repair, rebuild, expand and adapt. But development turns destructive when it preserves the name while displacing the ecology that gave that name meaning. Karachi has already perfected the language of superficial preservation. We hold up façades while hollowing out interiors. We have seen this in Kanji Building, Duarte Mansion, and many more. We retain the front elevation but erase the spatial memory behind it. We allow history to remain as a surface while new commercial logic occupies the depth. This is not preservation. It is heritage as costume. The same danger exists with cultural and civic institutions. One can preserve a brand, a plaque, a founding story, even a commemorative wall, and still lose the urban life that made the institution matter.

The main characteristics between event-based large infrastructure arts councils, corporate institutions and informal community projects is that a neighbourhood-level cultural space depends on a delicate network of conditions. It needs public transport, walkability, evening life, mixed-use surroundings, casual visibility, porous thresholds, and a sense of familiarity. People must be able to drop in, not just arrive by invitation. Students, artists, writers, activists, young professionals, neighbours and strangers must feel that the space is part of their mental map of the city. Such spaces are not only attended; they are inhabited. Therefore, they are community projects and not corporate or state councils.

Karachi's grassroot community institutions understood this instinctively. Mehr Ghar in Lyari, Rangoonwala Community Centre in Bahadurabad and Ghalib Library in Nazimabad are not only buildings with programmes. They are embedded in neighbourhood histories. Their value comes from the way they sit within communities that already have their own rhythms, languages, anxieties, memories and forms of gathering. They do not need to become

monumental in order to matter. Their scale is part of their intelligence. Lyari, for example, cannot be understood in isolation. It is a dense urban world of cultural production, political memory, sport, music, migration and resilience. A community space there carries a different meaning from the same programme placed elsewhere. It is not simply 'service delivery'; it is recognition. Similarly, a library in Nazimabad or a community centre near Bahadurabad belongs to a geography of everyday use. Its users are not only audiences. They are neighbours, students, families, passers-by and repeat visitors who build attachment over time.

This is also visible in newer Karachi spaces that have emerged with modest means but strong civic imagination. The Centre For Art-based Methodologies and Well-being and Nani Ghar, Darham/ Marham, Kitab Ghar and Danish-o-Ramish represent a different model of public culture: smaller, intimate and community-facing. Once upon a time so was T2F. They are not trying to become grand cultural complexes. Their significance lies in creating rooms for reading, conversation, collective care, arts practice, learning, reflection and belonging. In a city where public space is scarce and often hostile, such areas become civic infrastructure on a neighbourhood level. They are not insulated from the city; they absorb it. They allow people to enter without the intimidation of institutional grandeur. They survive through trust, informality, shared labour, borrowed furniture, public generosity, uneven funding and the fragile ethics of care. They remind us that Karachi's cultural future may not only lie in large master-planned facilities, but in a constellation of smaller spaces rooted in different localities.

An industrial or employment-dominated district works differently. Its rhythms are shaped by work-hour mobility, production, institutional destinations, transport corridors and commuting patterns. It may contain communities, mixed-use pockets and important public institutions, but its dominant urban logic is not the same as that of a porous civic neighbourhood. After working hours, many of these areas lose the everyday street continuity that sustains informal cultural life. A space placed there may still host events, but it risks becoming a destination rather than a commons. This distinction matters in Karachi, where access is already unequal. Arriving by car is not an accessibility argument in a city where many people do not move by car, where women calculate routes through safety, where students depend on affordability, where public transport remains fragmented, and where distance is measured not only in kilometres but in social permission.

Karachi needs development. But every form of progress need not be bigger, more centralised and more institutional. The future of Karachi's cultural life cannot be measured through facilities alone. It must be measured through ecosystems. A city does not become progressive by uprooting its small civic rooms and rebuilding them as destination campuses. It becomes progressive when it understands that public culture grows through proximity, trust and place. Preservation, then, is not resistance to change. It is the discipline of asking what gives a place its life before deciding how to change it.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 29, 2026

Leveraging the platform economy

MAJYD AZIZ



The platform economy has emerged as a formidable force in human resource development, employment generation, and advancing gender empowerment and equality. Rather than producing goods themselves, these platforms function as digital intermediaries that connect buyers, sellers, and service providers, creating value through seamless interactions and transactions.

This sector has increasingly drawn women into the digital ecosystem, including in Pakistan, where entrenched household structures, community norms, and broader patriarchal traditions have historically constrained both employment opportunities and enterprise creation for women.

Deeply embedded socio-cultural expectations, shaped by long-standing traditions and perceptions of gender roles, have often limited women's ability to assert their rights, pursue their aspirations, or translate talent into economic participation.

However, the expansion of online freelancing, access to e-commerce platforms for women-led micro and small enterprises, improved financial access, and the relative flexibility of home-based digital work have collectively created new impetus and have been readily embraced by many women entrepreneurs.

These developments have enabled many women to begin overcoming socio-cultural barriers, restrictive mindsets, mobility constraints, gender-based harassment and violence, while also gradually narrowing a persistent though still significant – digital gender gap that continues to impede upward economic mobility.

At women-specific seminars and conferences, discussions typically revolve around the extent of women’s participation in Pakistan’s digital economy, their access to the skills and competencies required to leverage digital technologies, whether their engagement represents long-term career building or sporadic participation, the persistence of gender-based wage disparities, and the extent to which they are capitalising on global digital platforms such as Amazon, Airbnb, Alibaba and others.

In this context, the prevailing prejudiced system is gradually shifting towards optimism, with even sceptics increasingly recognising the new dynamics of business and employment. There is growing acceptance that a turbocharged technological revolution has fundamentally transformed the way individuals, organisations, and markets interconnect.

Against this backdrop, the Employers’ Federation of Pakistan (EFP) has initiated a process to sensitise women employers, among others, to leverage the platform economy. The initiative also seeks to strengthen awareness around employee welfare across full-time, remote, and mobility-based work arrangements.

The focus of these efforts remains women-led micro, small and medium enterprises, many of which continue to operate informally through social media platforms. However, targeted information and structured training are expected to significantly enhance their transition towards formal digital platforms. The programme also places emphasis on digital tools, improved access to fintech solutions, and core business skills.

Digital access remains essential for women entrepreneurs, not only in urban centres but also in rural areas. Extensive discussions and engagements with various workers’ federations have highlighted a substantial pool of women in rural regions who could be encouraged to participate in the platform economy.

However, this task is complicated by a significant gender gap in digital access, particularly in rural settings. The challenge is further exacerbated by widespread illiteracy and low levels of educational attainment among women.

One possible response lies in establishing informal collectives where rural women can gather to access information, engage with experts, absorb knowledge, and establish direct connections with digital platforms. A key reason for hesitation among many rural women is the apprehension of navigating these opportunities in isolation, often described as “sailing in choppy waters” without adequate support.

While many possess considerable skills and talent, they require structured encouragement to effectively leverage social media for economic activity. They also need targeted coaching to overcome initial constraints, including unreliable internet connectivity and weak infrastructure, household responsibilities such as childcare and domestic work, socio-cultural

and regional barriers, limited mobility due to transport constraints, and restricted financial resources.

It is therefore imperative for the government to intervene with structured support programmes, including start-up incubators, monetisation pathways, and social media marketing assistance, to enable and encourage greater participation of rural women in the digital economy.

The adoption of International Labour Organisation Convention 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy provides protections for digital workers across both formal and informal segments of the economy. It seeks to ensure that remuneration due to platform workers under national laws, regulations, collective agreements, or contractual obligations is duly honoured.

The convention also recognises the role of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, alongside enabling systems that allow them to operate, expand, and remain sustainable, while promoting fair and ethical business competition. In this context, organisations such as the Employers' Federation of Pakistan, the Pakistan United Workers Federation, and the Government of Pakistan supported the adoption of the Convention.

Building on this framework, efforts have been initiated to establish bilateral dialogue between platform workers and employers to promote decent work while ensuring business sustainability and growth. Work is also underway on forming platform workers' trade unions and platform employers' associations to strengthen structured social dialogue.

As Henry Ford once said: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 29, 2026

Epistemic terrorism

DR RAASHID WALI JANJUA



In today's day and age, terrorism is not merely enabled by ideology and technology but also most effectively by an epistemic strategy that sacralises the ideological lineaments of the terrorists' main creed.

A concrete indication of this trend is the Taliban government's use of sophisticated strategic communication tools through epistemic proxies like the Al Mirsaad, a web-based publication funded and directed by Taliban regime's General Directorate of Intelligence's media wing.

Recently, the Al Mirsaad's credentials as a Taliban mouthpiece were exposed by a report, "Heretics, Adversaries, & Legitimacy" by the Durand Despatch, an independent digital news organisation that specialises in security and counter-terrorism affairs in Afghanistan and South Asia.

The analysis of the Al Mirsaad's 137 articles, published between October 2025 and March 2026, identified a pattern of deification of the internationally isolated and delegitimised Taliban regime.

The Taliban's messaging strategy

It appears that the Taliban regime has started employing sophisticated information operations through mouthpieces such as Al Mirsaad, extending the reach of their strategic messaging to

the Western audience, ostensibly to curry favour with the human rights sensitive West, which so far has ostracised the Taliban for their education apartheid against women and imposition of medieval strictures upon minorities.

To this end, the Al Mirsaad has been eulogising the Taliban regime in an attempt to establish its credentials as a sovereign entity that deserves international legitimacy. Russian recognition, and Indian diplomatic warmth have been cited as indicators of increased acceptance of the Taliban regime's legitimacy and reasonableness, while countries like Pakistan are castigated for their aggression against Afghanistan. Clever communication artifices are employed to present the terror-supporting Taliban regime as a victim of the ISKP's (Islamic State of Khurasan and Pakistan) terrorism which is propped up by the West and Pakistan.

This allusion is drawn to elicit Russian sympathy and is clearly evident in the shape of maximum number of articles on the theme in the month of July 2025 when the Russians were mulling over the option of recognising Taliban regime.

A narrative of victimhood

The terror apologists typically resort to the gaslighting tactics of concealing the misanthropy of terrorists in a victimhood narrative. The Al Mirsaad apparently practices the same tactics by burying the brutally oppressive and obscurantist image of Taliban in a carapace of mendacity by framing their distorted ideology as a counterpoint to a bigger menace – the sectarian terrorism of ISKP/Daesh.

Of the 137 articles produced by Al Mirshad, couched in language and idiom targeting the Western audience, over 50 per cent frame the ISKP as the main terrorist threat to regional peace and security while only 4 articles mention the TTP as a kindred terrorist entity.

In order to divert attention away from the egregious human rights violations and the blood curdling atrocities against the women, minorities, and hapless Afghan population, the Taliban regime has started a self expiatory epistemic campaign to paint a halo of innocent piety around itself. The strategy is to shift the focus away from their medieval statecraft towards entities like the ISKP to confuse the international community and to accuse neighbours like Pakistan of proxy warfare in Afghanistan.

The reality, however, cannot be obscured in this age of technology enabled transparency. Empirical evidence clearly points towards a steady rise of TTP-sponsored terrorism. Ever since the American departure from Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan has suffered over 3,000 civil and military casualties at the hands of the TTP, which operates from Afghanistan, under the patronage of Taliban regime. According to the Institute of Economics & Peace (IEP), Afghanistan has emerged as a major terror exporting hub due to weak governance, diffusion of terrorist ideologies and the prevalent conflict economy.

A deflection campaign

Meanwhile, the Taliban regime has perfected the art of dissembling and prevarication when it comes to the accusations of supporting terrorism. It poses to the world that it is opposing

the ISKP and Al Qaeda, whereas it is a fact that Afghanistan has become a farraginous blend of terror entities under the benign gaze of the Taliban, who regard all these groups as their ideological kinsmen. There is a free lateral movement of terrorists from the Taliban to ISKP, Al Qaeda, ETIM, and IMU and all these terror franchises share the operational and logistical intelligence besides being animated by the same deviant version of ideology that celebrates spread of ideology through violence.

The Al Mirsaad, as a narrative building vehicle of a terror supporting regime shies away from even engaging with the issue of TTP terrorism that lies at the heart of the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict.

Al Mirsaad's criticism of Pakistan's retaliation against the TTP bases in Afghanistan is undergirded with the identical legal and moral logic as articulated by the Taliban regime's spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid, without concentrating on the elephant in the room the TTP's brutal terror campaign against Pakistani civilians as well as law enforcement agencies.

Through channels such as Al Mirsaad, the Taliban regime is trying to redeem itself in the eyes of the international community. The Indian rapprochement, though driven largely by Indian anti-Pakistan animus, is also being presented as an opportunity for the Taliban regime to gain international recognition, knowing fully well the difficulties inherent in the undertaking due to the ICC's arrest warrants for the Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhunzada and the Afghan Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani.

The global consensus against the Taliban's human rights violations and the support of terrorist entities like Al Qaeda and ISKP is evident in the form of frequent UN censures of the Taliban regime for their blatant disregard of human rights and concomitant support to a large ecosystem of terrorism finding a salubrious environment under the Taliban's patronage.

Justifying support for terror through epistemes is a bigger crime than the acts of terror themselves.

SOURCE: DAWN, JUNE 29, 2026



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