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UN report sees enormous potential benefits and big risks from AI

Figurines with computers and smartphones are seen in front of the words "Artificial Intelligence AI" in this illustration taken on Feb 19, 2024. — Reuters/File

The rapid development of AI offers huge potential benefits to countries and people around the world, but also poses big risks, 40 leading scientists and experts said in the first report by a United Nations independent scientific panel on the technology.

The report, to be presented to governments at an inaugural UN Global Dialogue on AI governance in Geneva July 6 to 7, offers the first global, independent scientific assessment of AI, with a fuller, comprehensive report planned next year.

Members of the panel were drawn from every region of the world, and its members serve a three-year term, independent of any government, institution or company.

According to the report, policymakers need scientific evidence to govern AI but its capabilities are outpacing scientific understanding and governments' ability to adapt, with few methods available for controlling highly autonomous AI systems.

Panel co-chair Yoshua Bengio also noted growing evidence of deceptive AI behaviour and said science could not guarantee AI will not cause catastrophic harm "either on its own or due to malicious users" as capabilities increase.

"The potential benefits of AI are enormous," the report concluded. "The rapid, unchecked deployment of the technology at scale also presents considerable risks, including harms to the mental health of users, potential use as a destructive tool, impacts on social, economic and environmental systems, and challenges associated with controlling the technology."

It further said that AI adoption has accelerated broadly, but unevenly, across countries and sectors. Globally, over a billion people now use conversational AI weekly, but adoption in developing countries lags.

It noted that AI development is even more concentrated, with the US accounting for 75 per cent of the computing power among the world's top 500 AI supercomputers, and China 15pc.

Although more than 7,000 languages are spoken worldwide, current AI models are trained for only small fraction and machine translation of some languages is riddled with errors that can affect health diagnoses and treatment decisions.

Risks include potential negative impacts on human rights, social systems and the environment, with AI-generated child sexual abuse material and deepfake-enabled sexual violence circulating more frequently.

AI also makes it easier to produce and target persuasive content at scale, contributing to a "gradual erosion of information integrity that can weaken public trust, social cohesion and democratic deliberation".

Most countries, including advanced economies, lack the technical expertise to assess the most capable new AI models or participate meaningfully in their governance, the report said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 01, 2026

High-profile attacks persist in June despite overall decline in terrorism: PICSS

Paramilitary soldiers cordon off the streets around the Mosamiyat Chowrangi area after a terrorist attack on Pakistan Rangers compound in Karachi on June 27, 2026. — AFP

Despite several high-profile attacks, Pakistan witnessed a decline in overall anti-state violence and related security incidents during June, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

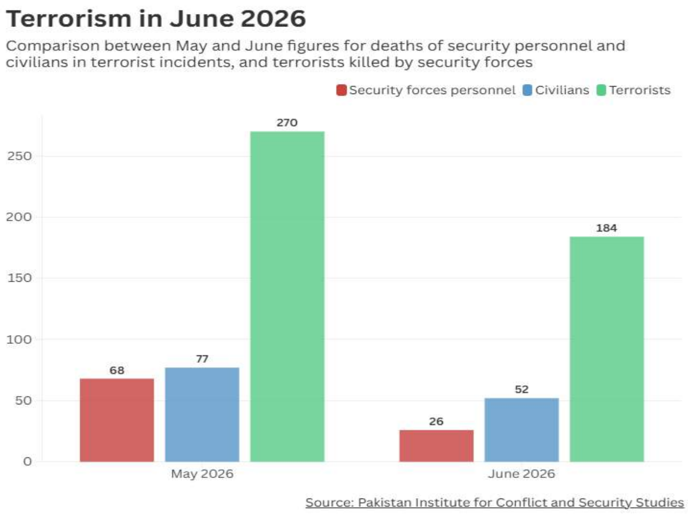
According to PICSS — an Islamabad-based think tank that monitors terrorism, anti-state violence and related security trends — 184 terrorists were killed in operations by Pakistani security forces, accounting for the largest share of the total 262 fatalities.

On the other hand, 52 civilians and 26 security forces personnel lost their lives during the month.

The breakdown of the injured showed that 63 civilians, 50 security forces personnel, 18 pro-government peace committee members and three terrorists were wounded.

Compared with May, fatalities among Pakistani security forces declined by 62 per cent, while civilian deaths dropped by 27pc. Terrorist deaths also registered a 32pc decrease.

Among the injured, PICSS recorded a 43pc decline in security forces casualties, a 57pc decrease among civilians and a 67pc reduction among terrorists.



PICSS also noted a 50pc reduction in kidnappings, with 27 people kidnapped in June compared with 54 in May. Pakistani security forces also arrested at least 27 suspected terrorists during the month.

The number of terrorist attacks also declined, falling from 128 in May to 108 in June, a reduction of around 16pc.

However, PICSS noted, the country continued to face “high-impact attacks, including at least four suicide attacks”.

Three of these were vehicle-borne suicide bombings, including the “high-profile attack” targeting Sindh Rangers in Karachi on June 27, which claimed the lives of three security personnel.

In May, the country had witnessed six suicide attacks, including four vehicle-borne suicide bombings.

Province-wise breakdown

Providing a province-wise breakdown for June, PICSS observed that Balochistan witnessed a “significant decline” in terrorism.

The province recorded 49 attacks in June compared with 71 in May, marking a 31pc reduction.

The tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly Fata, also recorded a decline, with 17 attacks in June compared with 22 in May, representing a 23pc decrease.

However, the rest of KP witnessed a “slight increase”, PICSS said, as the province recorded 37 attacks in June compared with 32 in May, representing a 16pc rise.

On June 9, six Federal Constabulary (FC) personnel were martyred and four were injured while responding to an attempt by terrorists to capture a post in Peshawar’s Hassan Khel area, sources said. Eight terrorists were killed in retaliatory action.

Sindh also recorded an increase in terrorism, with four attacks reported in June compared with only one in May, the think tank said.

"Punjab witnessed only one attack, while no militant attack was reported from Islamabad, Azad Kashmir or Gilgit-Baltistan," PICSS said.

The report also provided the figures for the first six months of 2026: 2,166 fatalities, including 1,442 terrorists, 404 civilians, 307 security forces personnel and 13 members of pro-government peace committees.

Another 1,137 people were injured during this period, including 692 civilians, 281 security forces personnel, 136 terrorists and 28 peace committee members.

In 2025, Pakistan ranked number one on the Global Terrorism Index for the first time, recording a 6pc increase in terrorism-related deaths (1,139).

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 01, 2026

Dunki 2.0 goes Crypto: hawala in Pakistan's $300 million smuggling machine

In a busy Italian town square, a man dances to a hip-shaking Punjabi song. People gather around him in delight. Two tourists take part in his vlog and lean in to kiss his cheek. Others pause, watch, smile, and move on.

On TikTok, over 1.8 million followers watch his content. Within minutes of the videos going live, the comments section explodes. WhatsApp numbers are dropped into the feed.

“Europe is my dream,” says one person. “Koi visa lagwade,” says another (Someone please help me with a visa). Another one chimes in with, “Brother, guide me on how to reach Pavia.”

Not everyone online is impressed with this dancer, however. He is accused of immorality, forgetting his roots, and giving Pakistan a “bad image abroad”. He smiles into the camera and claps back, “Saddo shareeko,” a line meant for jealous relatives watching back home.

For the young ones watching from Pakistan the Italian square, the attention, are proof that he made it which is all that matters. These yearning souls are the human grist that keeps the mill of Pakistan’s human smuggling machine running as a 80-billion-rupee industry. Social media recruits for it; cash, hawala, and cryptocurrency fund it; and smugglers now rely on valid passports to execute it.

The boy from Kharian

In Gujrat's Kharian Tehsil, 17-year-old Arif is one of these hopefuls. A pseudonym protects his identity.

In his village, migration is a rite of passage. Arif spends his nights scrolling vlogs and reels of Pakistanis abroad. "Ever since I grew up, I have wanted to go abroad," he tells Dawn. "My relatives and villagers have also gone, but my dreams came from the lifestyle I saw online. They are living in heaven. And what are we doing here?"

The money is his first hurdle. His mother has jewelry, but his sister is getting married next year, and his father has gone into debt. He believes, however, that once he is in Belgium, it won't be tight anymore because he will earn.

The agent he contacted online, Munawwar or Raja from Mandi Bahauddin, told Arif he could not go legally because he had failed his matriculation exams. "Toh game lagani paregi," he told him, using the code word for crossing borders illegally. We'll have to game it. Of course, it was dangerous, but Arif shrugs off the risk and invokes God as his protector. Have others not succeeded after all?

Human smuggling networks are lighting up because in April 2026 Spain launched a large-scale regularisation process, offering legal status to approximately 500,000 undocumented migrants in response to a domestic labour shortage, with applications open until June 30, 2026.

The royal decree strictly applies to people already in Spain before the end of 2025 but digital feeds reaching villages in Punjab have stripped away that detail. 'Good News for Pakistanis' posts followed the announcement, according to Kausar Abbas of the Sustainable Social Development Organisation (SSDO), a non-governmental organisation working to combat smuggling and trafficking.

Recruitment cycle in motion: An advertisement for a "Cargo Ship Game" departing March 25th (left) sits alongside a flood of inquiries from aspiring migrants (right). Upon seeing footage of successful crossings, users frequently spam the comments with a single word (number), hoping to bypass public threads for a direct line to an agent. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

A gamble worth billions

The world outside Gujrat is negotiated as a series of calculations based on who to trust and whether the 'Munawwars or Rajas' of the trade can deliver. These names are aliases masking actors in a global, multi-billion-dollar industry.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) value the worldwide human smuggling market at nearly $10 billion annually. The Pakistani corridor alone has become a mini regional economy within it. The trade generates an estimated Rs80 billion ($288 million) in yearly revenue with agents charging up to Rs3.5 million ($12,600) per head, according to law-enforcement officials and researchers.

Kausar Abbas of SSDO has seen families routinely pay more than what the agents demand. In the Adriana migrant boat tragedy in 2023, in which more than 300 Pakistanis died, it turned out that each person had paid from Rs4 million to Rs8 million. For many that kind of cash only comes if you sell your land, he explains.

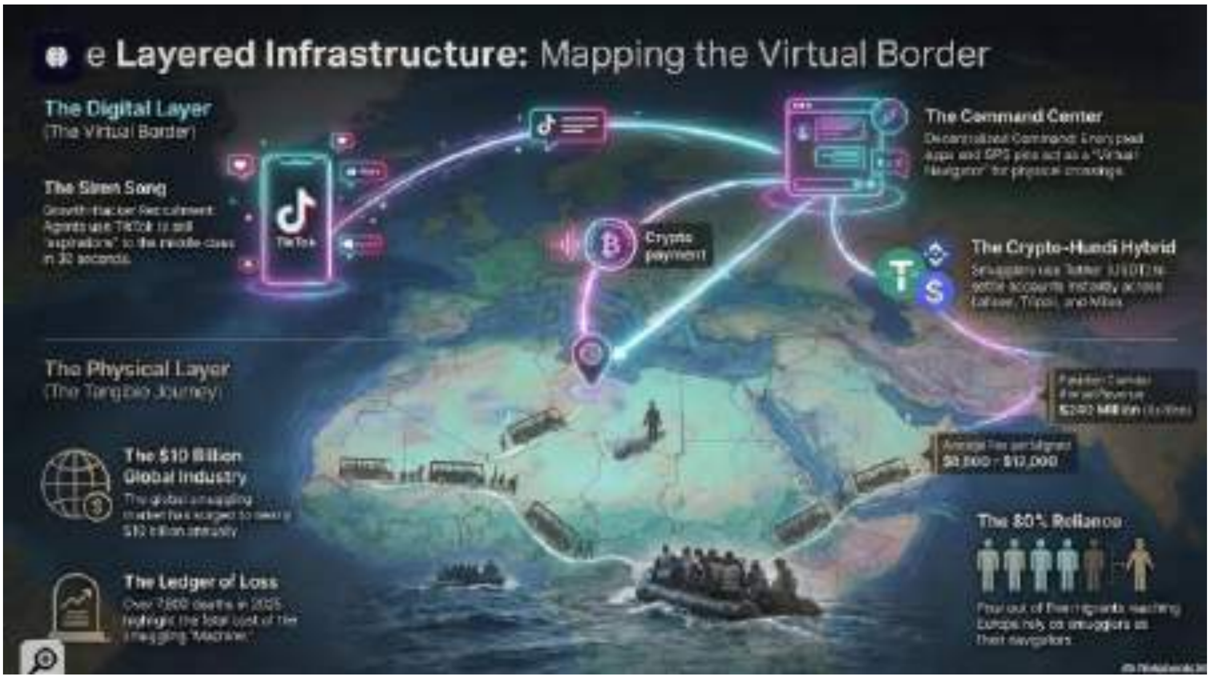
This financial gamble is born from a systemic “skill emergency,” according to Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute. Nearly 60 per cent of these migrants are unskilled, making them uncompetitive for formal overseas employment. As a result, the agents selling illegal routes win by default.

Decoding the recruitment feed: A standard Glossary of the Game used in the digital underworld. From rebranding a lethal crossing as ‘Dunki’ (donkey) or a ‘Game’ (operation), to religious branding (Alhamdulillah) and discussing pre-arranged bribes (Setting), these terms are the standardised vocabulary of the $10 billion trade. — created via Gemini AI

Journalist Aoun Sahi, who has reported on the trade, argues that these agents are rarely sketchy loners operating from the shadows, and more often than not, a part of the local scene.

Those at the top of the chain are influential locally with political and bureaucratic connections. This explains why even the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) fired some of its own officials for their involvement in the trade after the 2023 Greek boat tragedy.

The money handed over by families, often their life savings, is laundered back into the local economy through real estate, grain markets, and gold, a pattern the FATF documented in its 2022 report on money-laundering risks arising from migrant smuggling. “The state always goes after the low-hanging fruit,” he says. “But the rest of the mafia, including the businesses associated with the trade, continue to operate with impunity.”



A 2026 breakdown of the global migrant smuggling industry, which now generates an estimated $10 billion annually. In Pakistan alone, this “shadow economy” is approximately valued at over Rs70 billion ($240 million), driven by an increasingly sophisticated “Crypto-Hundi” financial circuit. — Generated via Notebook LM.

How to get on a boat

The FATF's 2022 report documents the chain. Families pay smugglers mainly in cash, deposited through intermediaries in small amounts and quickly withdrawn. The hawala system, operating through mini-markets, travel agencies, and mobile phone shops, receives the payment and holds it until arrival is confirmed (sometimes via videos uploaded to social media), releasing funds to the smuggler only once the crossing is complete. Dawn's review of social media content found several cases of migrants uploading videos to announce their arrival.

Proceeds are integrated into the white economy through shops, car dealerships, restaurants, and real estate, often run by relatives recruited as front operators. In Pakistan, FIA's Deputy Director for Immigration, Shahzad Akbar, confirms that this pattern has evolved. "They generally collect initial payments in cash from the passenger or their family, with funds transferred to overseas coordinators through informal hawala/hundi channels, which operate outside the formal banking system." Families are rarely provided receipts, making the trail difficult to trace.

Recent cases, Akbar tells Dawn, indicate a gradual shift toward digital payment mechanisms, particularly cryptocurrency. In one case involving Pakistani victims trapped in scam operations in Cambodia, families transferred over $5,000 each in USDT (Tether) through a cryptocurrency wallet in order to secure their release. The USDT is a digital stablecoin pegged to the US dollar.

Brokers appear to mediate between scam operations, cryptocurrency wallets, and hawala channels, which makes the financial flows more complex and difficult to investigate.

B*, a Pakistani migrant who made the journey through Iran and Turkiye to reach Spain and spoke to Dawn on condition of anonymity, describes payments. Out of a total deal of Rs2 million, Rs0.5 million is paid upfront in Pakistan, and at each checkpoint, a new handler takes over and collects the next instalment.

"When the money is received, they take you ahead. This is how it is done, stepwise, as you reach your checkpoints."

The logistics of the game: Smugglers provide a global menu of routes — from the Balkans to Moscow — while the financial stakes are laid bare in the comments. Here, the price for a "Donkiy" (illegal crossing) to Italy is quoted at 45 Lakhs, a figure that anchors the multi-billion dollar "Machine." — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

Migrants are asked to pay in cash or through online bank transfers at each stage. "They don't trust cryptocurrency," B says. The digital currency and hawala networks operate at a different level, between agents rather than between migrants and agents. When a handler in Pakistan needs to settle with a handler in Turkiye, that is when crypto and informal transfers come into play.

The prisons of Benghazi

Tabassum Shehzad, 34, from Mandi Bahauddin, came back from Libya with nothing but debt and the memory of a prison cell.

His family scraped together Rs2.6 million ($9,350) to send him on a zigzagging route through Dubai and Saudi Arabia before he was dropped into the transit hubs of Libya, where smuggling networks and armed gangs control the movement of migrants. The demands did not stop.

“When we reached Libya, they (the agents) took another Rs1 million ($3,600) from my father,” he says.

After a seven-hour drive to the coast, Shehzad was pushed into a leaky boat that faltered almost immediately. The vessel never made it to international waters as it was intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard.

“When we were caught, there were about four or five boys in the boat who died,” he says. The survivors were hauled to the Qanfoodah Detention Centre in Benghazi, where Shehzad spent two and a half months being beaten by guards while his family scrambled to wire more cash just to keep him fed.

A “proof of life” video from a Libyan “0 Point” warehouse. These grainy updates are the currency of the trade, serving as the trigger for families in Pakistan to release the next installments of cash. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

Qanfoodah is part of a constantly shifting network of 27 to 33 officially recognised immigration detention facilities across Libya, according to United Nations data and the Global Detention Project.

He eventually returned to Pakistan with no fortune, only a debt of Rs2.8 million and the memory of 700 other Pakistanis still trapped in those cells. According to IOM Libya's Migrant Report Key Findings 60, Pakistani nationals made up 0.5 per cent of the 939,638 migrants identified across the country as of December 2025. The figure suggests nearly 4,700 Pakistanis were part of the migrant population in Libya at that time.

A source working on the ground in Libya confirmed to Dawn that Pakistani nationals continue to be held in detention facilities across the country, though exact, centralised figures remain difficult to verify.

When asked if he would try to leave again, however, Shehzad does not hesitate. "What's there for us in Pakistan?" he says, though he warns others to seek legal routes. In the circular logic of the GT Road belt, a rigged gamble is still seen as better than no gamble at all.

Abbas of SSDO, who has worked extensively with deportees, says this is the pattern. "They are victims because they fall into that trap; they don't know what will happen," he says. "Fake dreams and false commitments of employment lure them in."

In 2025, the International Organisation for Migration recorded 7,667 deaths on migration routes, including 44 Pakistanis on the Atlantic route in January alone. At least 20 Pakistanis were feared missing off the Italian coast this April.

Lawyer Azfar Shakeel, who has worked on migrant rights cases, argues that this makes assuming consent the wrong framework to judge these cases. “Misinformation and deception are standard practices deployed by smugglers,” he says. “Can acts borne out of such desperation truly be considered consensual?”

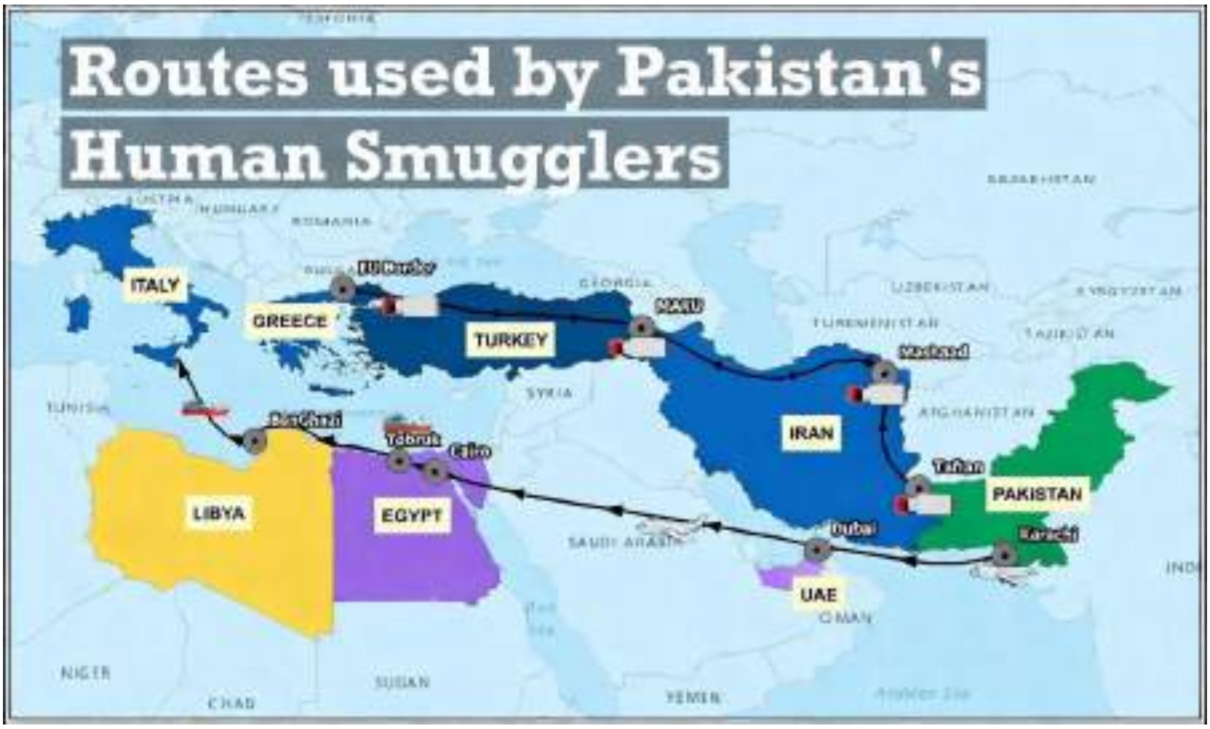
Visual validation: A screenshot of a video showing a “ricve” (or reached) notification or successful arrival post in Italy. In the smuggling economy, these images are the green light that tells families in Pakistan the next payment is due, even as the migrant enters the most dangerous phase of the journey. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

The cost of Balochistan’s borders

In February 2026, the families of six young men from Mandi Bahauddin and Gujranwala learned what had happened to their sons on the night of December 19, 2025, near the Iranian border city of Kerman.

Two of the deceased, whose fathers spoke to Dawn, were identified as Muhammad Abdul Basit, 17, and Aliyan Ishaq, 25. They had all been passed from one sub-agent to the next, all the way to the Iranian border, in what those in the trade call the ‘handover’.

For the young men, the journey comprised a series of anonymous transfers. According to Aliyan’s father, Muhammad Ishaq Butt, his only son, was moved through difficult terrain in vehicles arranged by an agent specifically to bypass paramilitary checkpoints.



Map showing the human smuggling route from Pakistan to Italy. — Generated via ChatGPT

Basit's father, Muhammad Mansha Gondal, maintains that his son was shot by the Iranian border force while trying to cross the border with Aliyan. He describes how quickly things moved once his son made up his mind. While he was still trying to arrange a legal route, his 17-year-old, convinced by the older Aliyan, "took the money from home without my permission" and left for Balochistan in mid-December.

Their last contact came on December 19, 2025. "I haven't spoken to him since then," Aliyan's father says. Both families confirmed to Dawn that they received their sons' bodies in mid-February and have since laid them to rest. Butt adds that his son was headed to Iraq but died in Iran, a discrepancy his family only discovered afterwards.

Gondal identified the smuggling agent as Adnan, from Lakhanwal village in Gujrat, operating from Qatar. "I demand the government arrest him," he says.

The FIA has since acted on at least part of that demand. According to BBC Urdu, an FIA spokesperson in Gujranwala confirmed that the main local handler who arranged the journey — not Adnan himself, who remains at large in Qatar — was arrested at Lahore airport while attempting to flee to Turkiye. He had charged each young man Rs0.27 million ($970) to take them to Iran.

The official account of what happened at the border, however, differs from Gondal's. While he says his son was shot by Iranian security forces, BBC Urdu reported that the deputy commissioner of Gujranwala told families the deaths were caused by a snowstorm. The question of how these young men died remains unresolved.

Muhammad Abdul Basit, 17 (left), and Aliyan Ishaq, 25. The two were part of a group that died near the Iranian border on December 19, 2025. — Photo provided by family

Muhammad Mansha Gondal (right) with his son Muhammad Abdul Basit. — Photograph provided by Gondal

Status anxiety and the 'martyrdom' narrative

Basit was 17, and his father was still arranging a legal route when he left. The question his death leaves behind is the same one every family in the GT Road belt eventually faces: why does the illegal path win?

Gondal, speaking to BBC Urdu, described his son's obsession. "He kept saying to me, 'When so many people have gone to Europe, why can't I go?' He used to say that one day I would send you so many pounds that you wouldn't have to work." Yet Gondal had always sensed the danger and did not want his son to make the journey. "I always told him to stay in front of my eyes," he told the outlet.

The father himself had lived in Germany for years before returning home permanently, which makes his son's death all the more painful. The boy was chasing something his own father had once had and chosen to leave behind.

The answer, according to psychologist Maha Iftikhar Nagi, rarely comes down to absolute poverty but is driven by something harder to see, what she calls "social comparison". Migration is rarely about adventure. "It is less about adventure and more about reclaiming dignity and self-worth."

In Punjab, this comparison has a physical form. B, the 28-year-old migrant now living in Spain, explains the appeal behind going abroad: "The large, brightly painted cement mansions in villages built by families with relatives abroad serve as permanent, community-wide advertisements for the game."

But money is not the only factor. "It is about the poverty of opportunity," Sahi, the journalist, says. Families spending up to Rs4 million ($14,400) to send their sons abroad clearly have the capital to start a local business, but they choose the 'game' instead.

"Locally, migration isn't just about survival, it is a way to tell your neighbours and relatives: we made it too," Sahi adds. "They see the freedom on social media and decide that the gamble is the only way to truly live."

In these communities, identity is socially constructed. "When peers migrate and display economic progress, staying behind feels like stagnation, which translates into shame and a wounded sense of self, even if material survival is secure," explains counsellor Farwa Naqvi.

This pressure, she continues, forces the mind to reorganise risk. It struggles to hold the tension between 'this opportunity will improve my life' and 'this could kill me', and consequently resolves the discomfort by filtering out threatening information.

As Nagi puts it: "The danger is not ignored. It is reframed, allowing hope to keep us moving forward."

The language of desperation: A comment from a user asking for help to join the "Dunki." The phrasing reflects how the crossing is viewed not as a crime, but as a necessary—if lethal—rite of passage for those feeling left behind by the local economy. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

At the community level, that reframing has a name. Nazakat Hussain, who worked on a migration project at the European Research Institute, calls it a "martyrdom narrative". A death on the dunki route is frequently framed not as a tragedy but as a sacrifice for family uplift. "Migration is seen as responsibility and courage while staying can bring social stigma."

In this skewed moral economy, the young man who dies at a border or at sea is hailed as a martyr, while the one who stays for a local job is seen as a failure. Smugglers have exploited this "prestige standard".

Agents also use religious references and phrases like 'insha Allah' (God willing), 'hijrat' (a term deeply rooted in Islamic history, culture, and theology), and 'Allah ke karam se game kamyab hogaya hai' (the game has been successful with the blessing of God) to appeal to people and legitimise the journey.

In the eyes of the community, they are not criminals but the only ones who deliver.

When one makes it, everyone wants to go

In Sialkot's Daska tehsil, Ibrar Hasher, 31, has seen this unfold for years—young men choosing the irregular route while he underwent the painstaking documentation required to move to Saudi Arabia legally.

Even the death of hundreds of Pakistan migrants enroute Europe didn't break the spell in his village. "When the Libyan boat sinking incident took place in 2025, there were three men from my village in that boat," Hasher recalls. "Two of them died, but one made it through and somehow reached his destination."

At the time of the sinking, around 30 to 35 boys from his village were already in Libya, waiting to move forward. "Most of them came back to Pakistan, but some stayed there, hoping that they would make it … they had already sold everything before leaving, even their houses."

But back home, people did not see the lone survivor's story as a warning. For them, it was a success story, one of those exploited by agents, who lure people into believing that they would choose safe routes.

To these young men, the documentation Hasher went through for his Saudi visa appears as a wall they have no patience to climb. Instead, they opt for easier albeit illegal routes. It starts off with them pestering their families, who then do everything to help them realise their dreams.

But Hasher is clear: the legal route is the only route worth taking. He applied for a European visa himself from Riyadh recently and received a rejection. "Our country's reputation is not good compared to other countries," he says. "That is why they refuse to give us a visa."

For the young men watching from Hasher's village, that rejection is its own kind of answer.

Governing the algorithm

While migration to Europe is a common topic at village gatherings, and people tend to trust agents vouched for by relatives, much of the actual recruitment now happens over a phone screen.

A 2025 study titled "The Use of Social Media in Irregular Migration and Migrant Smuggling", published in the Journal of Borderlands Studies, identifies this digital layer as a "semi-public online marketplace", arguing that social media has become the "critical infrastructure" of modern smuggling.

Earlier in 2023, a Dawn investigation found how smuggling networks were actively recruiting on TikTok. Three years on, the trade is still advertising on the same platform, as seen in the screenshots embedded throughout this piece.

Dawn reviewed multiple social media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube, between December 2025 and February 2026 to trace accounts advertising illegal routes. On Facebook, recruitment was largely confined to closed groups or buried in old posts. On YouTube, content was sporadic and inconsistent.

The most active, systemic recruitment and advertising was found on TikTok, where dozens of accounts were seen openly advertising smuggling packages, with agents listing prices, routes, and contact details in plain sight. Despite removals new accounts advertising identical services appeared within days, revealing how the social media platform's content moderation is reactive rather than preventive.

In one post reviewed by Dawn, a TikTok account advertised a cargo ship departure to Greece on March 25, offering passage to five passengers for Rs2m with Rs0.2m ($720) required upfront. A Pakistani passport was listed as mandatory. A second post from the same account announced the same departure with comments disabled—a sign that such accounts are aware of the scrutiny they attract.

The open-air digital bazaar: Smuggling "games" are marketed with the clinical transparency of a legitimate travel agency. These advertisements utilise religious branding and "No Advance" promises to build trust, offering specific departure dates and routes. By the time global policy shifts are announced, the "Machine" has already translated them into promotional posters designed to trigger immediate, high-stakes decisions in Punjab's migration belt. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

"Not only is Europe's life being glorified on TikTok, but all the struggles there are also being cut off from it," Sahi says. The influencers are not just organic migrants sharing their journeys but now serve as a "calculated marketing arm" of the smuggling cartels. TikTokers and vloggers are also getting business by promoting brands and money transfer services through their videos.

TikTok says it does not allow content that facilitates or coordinates human smuggling. Between October and December last year, 98.6pc content violating the platform's exploitation policies was removed.

The company says it continually strengthens enforcement by reviewing emerging trends and working with external partners, adding that it has banned all flagged accounts for breaching community guidelines on human trafficking.

TikTok also works with Pakistani law enforcement, including the FIA, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency, and the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority, to identify and remove such content.

In the comment sections, the "legal fake-out" is discussed openly. Users inquire about 22-Lakh by air routes to Greece, utilising pilgrimage or work visas as a temporary shield for the first leg of the journey. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok.

Meanwhile, the International Organisation for Migration, Pakistan, has been cautious about claiming a direct correlation between social media use and irregular migration "unless supported by methodologically robust, consent-based research".

In a written explanation provided to Dawn, IOM notes that where data exists, it "more often shows associations: social media can amplify aspirations and smuggler marketing", while drivers such as livelihood, debt, and family networks are equally at play. The organisation acknowledges the need to "further expand reach and strengthen digital presence to promote safe, regular, and orderly migration" and to "effectively counter the high volume of misinformation promoted by smuggling networks".

Saad ur Rehman Khan, project manager at the International Centre for Migration Policy Development's Migrant Resource Centre in Pakistan, is candid about the limits of such efforts. "Structural inequalities and limited access to legal migration pathways, particularly for low-skilled workers, are broader policy challenges that cannot be resolved by awareness initiatives alone," he says.

FIA's Lahore Director Muhammad Ali Zia adds that the agency is "actively monitoring online platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp to combat human smuggling networks" using AI-powered tools to track suspicious activity.

"The FIA is working with social media companies to remove content that promotes human smuggling and to identify operators," he adds.

For now, the algorithm moves faster than the institution. By the time a policy response is drafted, another wave of 'Good News for Pakistanis' posts has already found its audience in a Punjab village.

Geography versus enforcement

If the airports are a filter, the land borders of Balochistan are a sieve.

B, who crossed into Spain this way, says his group was taken through routes specifically chosen to avoid thermal detection. They moved only at night, so border patrols would not spot them.

Professor Hafeez Jamali, an anthropologist and former faculty member at Habib University in Karachi, says human smuggling networks operating in Balochistan are not simply repurposed fuel smuggling infrastructure but a “super, super secretive” chain operating on its own terms.

“While vehicles used for oil smuggling may be repurposed for trafficking migrants, the economic networks involved are different,” he tells Dawn. “The oil smugglers are not, based on my research, necessarily dealing with human trafficking, and the human traffickers are not necessarily dealing with oil smuggling.”

In districts like Chaghi, the largest in Pakistan by area, a handful of FIA, Levies, and Frontier Corps personnel are tasked with covering vast swaths of territory. Stopping human trafficking and smuggling comes on top of counterinsurgency and border management duties.

The ‘machine’ does not need to bypass the state. It simply exploits the gaps left by overstretched resources, operating in terrain where personnel are, in Jamali’s words, “barely able to survive in this waterless wasteland themselves”.

He is careful to distinguish between individual corruption and systemic collusion, saying that, “there is no evidence to suggest that there is a systemic involvement of any particular law enforcement agency in facilitating such an illegal activity”. Based on his 2017-18 fieldwork, corruption exists, but individual lapses are different from institutional facilitation.

Those lapses converge in Turbat.

Kech-based journalist Asad Baloch has documented nearly 150 to 200 arrests in a single month in Turbat alone. The network, he says, is almost certainly very large and influential and involves both local and outside operators working in coordination, with locals responsible for the final leg of the journey. Migrants typically travel by pick-up vehicles or passenger buses rather than the Zamyad vehicles associated with diesel smuggling, which he says are rarely used for human smuggling. Most are caught hiding or travelling openly.

He says that over the years, due to the crackdown from law enforcement, the routes have also shifted. Migrants once used land routes through the Mand, Boleda, and Zamoran areas of Balochistan toward Iran, but those are now largely abandoned. “Most people want to go to the coast via the highway on the road to the river,” Baloch adds.

Some are caught. Some make it through.

The assumption that migrants use mountain roads and rough terrain to evade security is only partially true. “Obviously, they use mountainous and rough roads as well but the people who have been caught, around 200 in one month, were not on rough roads. They were using regular roads and were caught

at the main highway.”

In January this year, he says, around 70 people were apprehended on the same route. “They were also travelling on the main highways and thoroughfares, not on the kachha roads.”

How these migrants reach Turbat at all, Baloch says, remains unanswered. “I spoke to the authorities, to the police, about how these people come here, but they, too, do not have an effective answer to this.”

90-second scan and the ‘legal fake-out’

At Pakistan’s immigration counters, an officer has less than 90 seconds to decide a traveller’s fate. It is a system built on a contradiction that the state has not resolved.

FIA Director General Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari points to the “added scrutiny” as a force testing the very limits of airport infrastructure. FIA Lahore Director Zia tells Dawn that while the agency uses AI-powered risk analysis, the scale is immense, with 66,154 passengers offloaded in 2025.

Sahi questions what those numbers actually represent. In his reporting experience, only 30pc to 40pc of offloadings are based on genuine suspicion. The rest involve passengers who could not pay the ‘setting’, the bribe at the immigration counter, or officials completing quotas. “When an order comes from above, they have to complete the numbers,” he says. “A lot of cases will be mismanaged.”

Abbas of the SSDO adds that, “if 300 people are being recruited from a village, it did not happen overnight. The recruitment drive had to be carefully surveilled.”

But stopping people at airports is not enough.

"Offloading is an enforcement tactic, not a migration strategy," says Dr Suleri of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute. "If the underlying drivers remain, the demand will simply re-route." Rather than just guarding gates, using AI to flag the money itself, tracking small, repeated remittances and unusual cash withdrawals will make the dunki product harder to sell.

Even when the gate holds, the 'machine' finds ways through it or simply buys its way past. Zia is blunt about the cost of integrity, saying that in 2025, 76 officials were dismissed and another 71 arrested. "They were the black sheep greasing the wheels of the very trade they were paid to stop."

In 2025, the FIA arrested 2,167 agents, of whom 1,648 were convicted.

The 'machine' has evolved to exploit the very legality the state enforces. As digital passports and biometric records make forged documents increasingly difficult to use, smugglers found a more elegant solution.

A former FIA official explains that they now meticulously distinguish between frequented and unfrequented routes, turning airport immigration counters into the front line of what he calls a "legal fake-out".

"It is a paradox of documentation," the official tells Dawn, requesting anonymity. "A person will present a genuine work permit for Libya, complete with a mandatory protector stamp. On paper, everything aligns with the regulatory framework."

The officer at the counter is under immense pressure. If they stop a traveller whose papers are technically perfect, they risk complaints to higher authorities and financial lawsuits. "Yet if that same person is later filmed drowning in the Mediterranean, the 'failure' falls squarely on the official who authorised the boarding."

While traditional enforcement (The Wall) seeks to block irregular routes, investigative data shows it often creates a pressurised environment that fuels exploitation and human rights abuses. True disruption requires shifting the flow toward safe, authorised pathways and addressing the underlying socio-economic drivers. — Generated via Notebook LM

Bukhari recalls one such case where people were going to Europe while carrying what appeared to be official letters from the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), apparently to attend a conference. "When questioned, they failed to provide basic details, and it later emerged that they had paid Rs2.3 million each to an agent," he says.

This deception extends to pilgrimages, according to a former FIA official. Migrants, he says, often join large delegations to Iraq or Iran under the guise of Ziarat, only to leave the group once across the border, moving toward illegal channels leading to Turkiye and Greece. In this ecosystem, a valid passport is not a travel document but a Trojan horse.

The FIA knows the gate is not enough. Because the masterminds live abroad and operate in the cloud, the agency has been forced to go past the terminal, setting up immigration liaison offices in Turkiye, Iran, Italy, Greece, and Spain. These officers recover missing nationals and interview victims in foreign jails while tracking financiers who operate with impunity.

The digital battlefield: While the state guards physical gates, a war of words plays out in the comments. On one side, agents

tirelessly reply to every inquiry to move the conversation to private encrypted apps. On the other, rare voices of dissent, as seen above, call for the arrest of these "fraudsters" (fradyion). This public pushback highlights a growing awareness of the "Machine's" deception, even as the recruitment continues in broad daylight. — Screenshots taken on March 13, 2026, by Sarah B. Haider via TikTok

According to the ex-FIA official, the physical chase is being outpaced. The trail rarely ends at a bank counter anymore, and by the time authorities flag a suspicious transaction, the money has often been tumbled through multiple crypto wallets, leaving investigators staring at dead ends.

The 'machine' is a global circuit. If you only cut the wire in Daska, the current simply finds a new path.

The feed

Back in Gujrat, the ‘machine’ still finds Arif and those like him in the dark.

He scrolls through an endless loop of TikTok videos and reels, nameless faces posing in European piazzas, high-energy music over grainy footage of the Mediterranean, and “success stories” that never mention the price of the ticket.

For those watching from the migration belt, these are not just videos but maps that leave out the Balochistan desert and the silence of Basit’s grave.

The real ‘machine’ is in the comments section. Underneath every video of a sunset in Italy or a street in Germany, a secondary world unfolds. Arif sees the trail of questions: “How much? Which route? Bhai, check WhatsApp! Plz DM me your number.” He sees the replies from anonymous accounts, the Telegram links in private messages, and the promises of a “guaranteed” crossing.

Arif knows the risks. He has seen the wooden boxes come home to families who will never be the same. But in the silence of the village, the ‘machine’ offers a rhythm of possibility that the state cannot yet silence.

The algorithms whisper the same promise they made to the dancer in the Italian square: that the ‘game’ is worth the gamble and that fate, unlike the FIA, might just let him through.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 02, 2026

Islamabad's anti-human smuggling strategy lauded

Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry speaks to the media in Islamabad.

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry said that Pakistan's strategy to combat illegal migration had become a model for the world, with the European Union acknowledging a significant decline in irregular migration from the country.

Speaking at the high-level meeting of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling in Vienna, Mr Chaudhry said that effective measures taken under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had resulted in a 47 per cent reduction in illegal migration. "Pakistan's successful str-ategy against illegal migration has become a model for the world," he was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the interior ministry.

The minister noted that irregular migration was "not merely a border issue but a global challenge" and stres-sed that a coordinated international strategy was essential to address it effectively. He added that expanding op--portunities for legal migra--tion was the need of the hour. "Modern technology, intelligence sharing, and a coordinated strategy are effective tools in combating human smuggling," Mr Chaudhry said, adding that irregular migration could not be curbed without promoting "safe, orderly, and legal migration."

Participants at the Global Alliance meeting also praised the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for its effective efforts in combating illegal migration and human smuggling.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 5TH, 2026

Social media hacking, extortion loot users

LAHORE: Incidents of fraud through hacking accounts on major social media platforms WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram have been increasing steadily across Pakistan, raising serious concerns about cyber security and public awareness.

The trend has continued even after the establishment of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in 2025, which replaced the cybercrime wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The agency was created to specifically address the growing number of cybercrime cases, particularly those involving social media fraud and online financial scams.

Several victims of social media hacking have also reported financial losses. Grade-20 government officer Muhammad Afzal Ahmed shared that hackers used his WhatsApp account to ask his friends and relatives for money, and several people transferred funds through mobile banking services before the account was restored after 24 hours.

Similarly, Rizwan Anwar had a fake Facebook account created in his name, which was used to request money from his contacts. Another victim, Shahid Ali, a mechanic, claimed that hackers collected Rs500,000 from people using his name after gaining access to his WhatsApp account. "I filed a complaint but am still waiting for action," said Ali.

Amir Naseem, Professor of Information Technology at the Government College, noted that the NCCIA did not yet have sufficiently advanced equipment and updated systems, making it difficult to trace hackers.

"Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media applications do not have formal agreements with the FIA, which creates additional difficulties in investigations," explained Naseem.

According to official records available to The Express Tribune, in 2024, more than 380,000 complaints related to WhatsApp, Facebook, financial fraud, and online scams were received. Of these complaints and investigations, 63 per cent originated from Punjab, while the remaining 37 per cent came from other provinces.

After the formation of NCCIA, the use of digital platforms continued to expand, and cybercrime also showed a sharp rise. In 2025 alone, the agency received 254,930 complaints related specifically to hacking of WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram accounts or the creation of fake profiles used to demand money.

In addition, more than 500,000 phone calls were received by the agency from citizens seeking information or reporting suspected fraud through phone calls or emails. During the same period, authorities recorded over 85,000 complaints related to financial fraud and more than 25,000 complaints directly linked to hacking incidents.

By February 2026, data shows that between 500 and 700 complaints related to social media hacking and fraud are being received each month.

According to officials, in Punjab alone more than 2,000 calls and emails are now received daily reporting hacking incidents or seeking help regarding cyber fraud.

Cybercrime and IT expert Shahid Hussain warned that criminals often impersonate friends or relatives to trick victims into sending money through duplicate accounts on WhatsApp, Facebook, and increasingly Instagram.

"Hackers also share fake prize or financial benefit links that can steal personal data when clicked. Some fraudsters make phone calls pretending to be from banks or government programs, including the Benazir Income Support Programme, to obtain sensitive financial information," noted Hussain.

"AI tools are now being used to copy photos and details to create fake profiles and send urgent money requests to contacts," added Hussain, who advised users to avoid suspicious links, report fake accounts, and enable two-factor authentication for better security.

Former FIA Director General Khadim Hussain Bhatti claimed that although the government has established the NCCIA, public awareness about cyber fraud remains limited. "Large-scale awareness campaigns and digital safety education are necessary to prevent people from falling victim to online scams," said Bhatti.

Officials from the cybercrime investigation agency acknowledged that cybercrime incidents are rising but maintained that efforts are underway to improve investigations, raise awareness and strengthen cooperation with educational institutions to educate the public about online safety.

Under the revised cybercrime procedures, citizens can now submit complaints related to cyber offences at their nearest police station instead of travelling to major cities, after which the cases are forwarded to the relevant cybercrime authorities.

SOURCE: TRIBUNE, JULY 06, 2026

India's FATF play and Pakistan's institutional answer

ZEESHAN AHMED

KARACHI: The appointment of Vivek Aggarwal as incoming Vice-President of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has been read in some quarters as if India has acquired a switch over Pakistan's financial reputation; that reading is convenient and it is also wrong.

He is not the sole authority over any listing decision; FATF has said he will serve as Vice-President from July 2026 to June 2027 under the incoming UK presidency, after previously heading India's delegation to the FATF. That gives India symbolism, access and agenda proximity, however, it does not give India unilateral power. Still, Pakistan should not treat the appointment casually. In international finance, proximity matters, pressure is rarely theatrical when it becomes effective. It is procedural, documented, repeated and timed well.

India does not need to control FATF to shape the conversation. It can submit dossiers, brief partner governments, frame Pakistan as a continuing terrorist-financing risk, and connect legacy allegations with newer concerns around charities, hawala networks, beneficial ownership, digital wallets, virtual assets and cross-border flows.

Pakistan's answer should begin with a simple fact: the country has already done the hard technical work that FATF asked for. Pakistan exited increased monitoring in October 2022 after completing the 2018 and 2021 action plans. Those were more than cosmetic requirements.

They required legal reform, regulator coordination, sanctions enforcement, supervisory upgrades, suspicious transaction reporting, terror-financing investigations and sustained engagement with FATF and APG processes. By 2022, Pakistan had 38 FATF recommendations rated compliant or largely compliant. That is a serious institutional record, and it should be defended without apology.

Exit is not immunity; FATF's framework has moved steadily toward effectiveness. Laws matter, but outcomes matter more. A country now has to demonstrate that its system works when tested: suspicious transactions must become usable intelligence; intelligence must become investigation; investigations must reach prosecution; prosecutions must produce credible sanctions; sanctions must be enforced; and inter-agency coordination must survive beyond presentation slides.

That is where Pakistan's focus should remain; the worst response would be rhetorical nationalism dressed as policy. FATF is a technical forum with geopolitical consequences; Pakistan has to answer at both levels.

India's current posture is not mysterious; Reuters reported in May 2025 that New Delhi intended to push FATF to return Pakistan to the grey list and oppose World Bank funding. Pakistan rejects the allegations; the caveat matters and so does the signal.

There is also a domestic political logic to the Indian line. India remains a high-growth economy, however, headline growth has not erased job-quality stress, underemployment concerns or social polarisation. In that environment, Pakistan remains a politically useful external reference point.

FATF rhetoric allows New Delhi to project national-security resolve, harden a familiar narrative, and convert a technical financial-crime forum into a stage for political signalling.

Pakistan should not respond to that stagecraft with stagecraft of its own. The right answer is to make relisting technically difficult, diplomatically costly and procedurally unjustifiable.

That means preparing before the argument is framed elsewhere, Pakistan should assemble a pre-emptive evidence dossier: terror-financing investigations, convictions, asset-freezing actions, targeted financial sanctions compliance, NPO supervision, beneficial ownership enforcement, suspicious transaction reporting, hawala disruption, mutual legal assistance, and the full chain from intelligence to prosecution.

It also means briefing key FATF members with discipline, not outrage. The message should be clear: Pakistan completed its action plans, continues to strengthen its AML/CFT framework, remains open to technical engagement, and will answer evidence through institutions rather than television noise.

The institutional burden is equally important. The FMU, SBP, SECP, FBR, FIA, provincial authorities and prosecutors need one operating picture. FATF vulnerabilities rarely sit inside one office; they sit in the gaps between offices. A transaction report that does not become intelligence, intelligence that does not become an investigation, an investigation that does not become prosecution, and prosecution that does not produce a proportionate sanction; that is where credibility is lost.

Pakistan must also treat virtual assets as part of the FATF file as the world is moving from bank-led surveillance to platform-led, wallet-led and stablecoin-enabled financial flows. FATF has already placed virtual assets, VASPs, DeFi risks and implementation gaps near the centre of its agenda. If Pakistan wants a regulated digital-asset economy, AML/CFT controls cannot be an afterthought. Licensing, registration, Travel Rule readiness, blockchain analytics, sanctions screening and cross-border supervisory cooperation must sit inside the policy design from day one.

The real danger is not Vivek Aggarwal personally; the danger is technical unreadiness meeting geopolitical intent. India will use the platforms available to it. Pakistan should assume that and prepare accordingly.

Pakistan cannot outrage its way out of FATF pressure. It has to win the file; that requires quieter confidence, better documentation, cleaner institutions and a state that understands financial credibility as a national-security asset.

The writer is a senior executive and policy-facing strategist with leadership experience across fintech, digital assets, energy, AI, and digital infrastructure. He has served in senior roles across the MENAP region.

SOURCE: TRIBUNE, JULY 06, 2026

38 security personnel martyred, 54 terrorists neutralised in recent Balochistan attacks

ISPR Director General (DG) Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry speaks during a press conference in Rawalpindi on July 8, 2026.

Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry on Wednesday said four civilians, 27 policemen and 11 security personnel had been martyred, while 54 terrorists had been killed in terrorist attacks and subsequent operations in Balochistan since July 5.

Highlights:

4 citizens die in armed attack in Hanna Urak on outskirts of Quetta on July 4/5

9 policemen martyred, 15 terrorists killed in July 6 attack on Ziarat checkpost

18 policemen martyred, 11 terrorists killed so far in ongoing Ziarat clearance operation

11 soldiers lose lives, 14 terrorists eliminated in today's attack on army convoy in Bela-Winder

6 terrorists killed in Kharan operation, 8 in Dalbandin

"We will hunt you, and we will hurt you everywhere," DG ISPR declares

Addressing a press briefing in Rawalpindi, the DG ISPR noted that there have been "three major terrorist incidents" in the past four days.

He provided details of each of those incidents — an armed attack on the outskirts of Quetta on July 5, an assault on a police post in Ziarat on July 6, and an ambush of an army convoy in Bela today.

"So, in the three major operations that I told you about, initially four civilians, and then police and army jawaans [were martyred], so our total martyrs are 42," he stated.

"Forty-two precious lives of this country … they gave their lives while protecting their country," he emphasised.

The DG ISPR added that 54 terrorists had been confirmed killed, according to the latest update.

"Right now, the situation is that the engagements are going on at multiple places. […] The army, FC (Frontier Corps), law enforcement agencies (LEAs), security forces and intelligence agencies are taking them on, both on the ground and in the air," he said.

The military spokesman vowed: "All of them will be brought to their logical end, the conclusion that they deserve."

Lt Gen Chaudhry said the first of three attacks took place on July 4/July 5 when "Fitna al Khawarij terrorists attacked the innocent local population" in Hanna Urak.

He added that the residents fought back very valiantly and "forced those terrorists belonging to Indian proxy Fitna Al Khwarij to flee".

The government uses the term "Fitna al-Khawarij" (FAK) to refer to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates.

"During that, four brave innocent citizens were martyred and six were injured," Lt Gen Chaudhry said.

Detailing the second incident, he recalled that FAK terrorists carried out a "multi-directional attack" on a police checkpost in Ziarat, which guards Pumping Station No.3 of Mangi Dam.

At least nine policemen, including two station house officers (SHOs), were martyred in the terrorist attack that took place on late Monday night.

The DG ISPR recalled that the policemen stood their ground and fought back and in "that fight, 15 kharji were sent to hell", while nine policemen laid down their lives.

He noted that reinforcements of the army and the Frontier Corps were immediately dispatched, but "before they could reach, the terrorists took the remaining police officials and took them hostage".

"Once the forces reached over there, there were at least 15 bodies of kharji left," he said, highlighting that the cops were all locals.

Lt Gen Chaudhry recalled that the FC, army personnel and LEAs "kept on engaging them and started surrounding them".

“We were very careful because of the collateral damage not to use any aerial assets because they had taken our youth hostage,” he said.

The DG ISPR revealed that 18 policemen were martyred as engagement with terrorists continued in the “mountains of Ziarat since July 6”.

“During this time, several khariji were killed as well, and once they knew that the net around them had been absolutely tightened, these cowards, low-lives martyred 18 brave personnel of Balochistan. They did that today,” he said, specifying that they were “18 of our police young boys”.

The ISPR spokesman noted that the operation was still underway, with 11 terrorists killed so far.

Providing a breakdown of the casualties in the two incidents, he said nine policemen were martyred in the checkpost attack and another 18 later, bringing the total number of cops who lost their lives to 27.

On the losses inflicted upon the terrorists, he said, “The dead bodies counted at the checkpost once they left the place were 15, and we have confirmed 11 [today], so total 26 kharijis have been killed.”

Providing details of the third terrorist incident that took place today, the military spokesperson said an army convoy in the area of Bela, Winder, and had an “engagement” with terrorists of the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA).

“The convoy was attacked and 11 soldiers — one junior commissioned officer (JCO) and 10 jawaans were martyred, and 14 terrorists of BLA Fitna al Hindustan were killed,” he said, adding that the incident took place near the N-25 highway.

The government uses the term “Fitna al Hindustan” (FAH) to refer to groups it accuses of being sponsored by India to execute terrorist attacks on Pakistani soil.

Moreover, the DG ISPR said the security forces killed six terrorists in an operation in Kharan and another eight terrorists in Dalbandin, all of whom he said were of FAH.

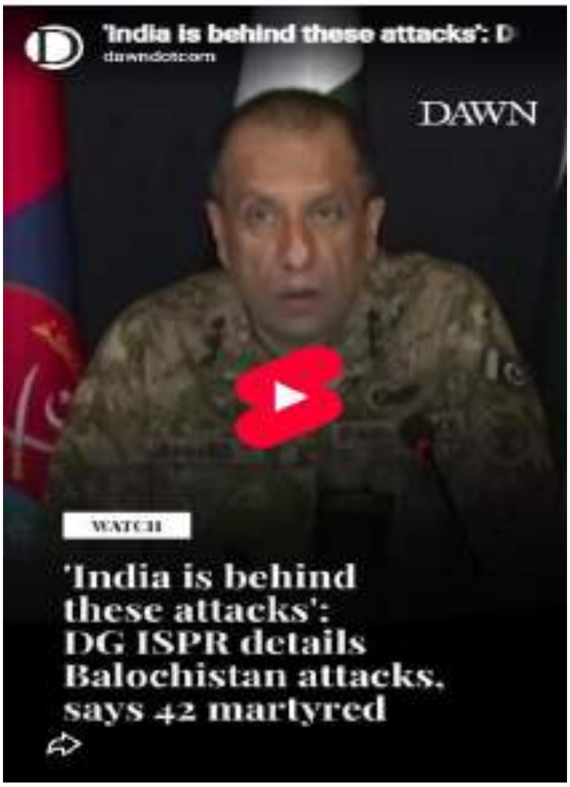
‘Forces with India using illegitimate Afghan Taliban regime’

Speaking about who was behind the attacks, Lt Gen Chaudhry named India and “those forces with India who cannot tolerate Pakistan’s respect, prosperity and stability”.

He reiterated the state’s stance that the elements were using “the territories under the control of this illegitimate Afghan Taliban regime as a base of operation”.

The DG ISPR asserted that the “majority” of the terrorists engaged and killed “turn out to be Afghan”.

He said that three of the four attackers in the June 27 attack on a Rangers camp in Karachi were Afghan. “The whole planning, equipping, everything was done from Afghanistan.”



Highlighting that the attacks took place in multiple locations, including Winder, Babrai and near Mangi Dam, the DG ISPR said there "is a scheme, mastermind, intent, logistics, operational sequence behind it".

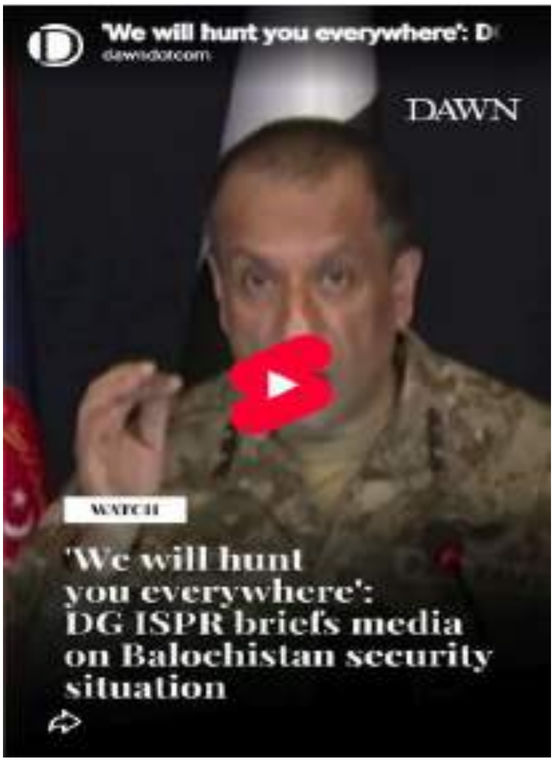
Stressing that Afghanistan was "providing the manpower for it", he said, "You do not want Balochistan to prosper? Because you know that Balochistan is Pakistan's lifeline and its pride. Because you know that Balochistan's prosperity is a reality that no one can change.

"You cannot digest it? You cannot accept it? You have a problem with the pipeline supplying water to Quetta? You have a problem with everything that is for the people of Balochistan."

"If that be it, then we are absolutely clear," he said, affirming that the armed forces — under the leadership of Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir and the guidance of the government had the resolve and clarity on "what to do with them".

"We will hunt you, and we will hurt you everywhere," the DG ISPR declared.

He emphasised that the government and people of Balochistan also had the same "clarity", pointing out that Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti travelled by road to Ziarat and spoke to the people there after the Mangi Dam incident happened.



Lt Gen Chaudhry remarked that the clarity shown by the state for the past three years — that terrorists had nothing to do with Islam and the FAH had "nothing to do with Balochiyat" — was creating "worry" among the terrorists.

"The government is telling them that we will throw out all these illegal Afghans, then they have a problem with that. They think by carrying out such acts, they can deter us," he said.

"You can only deter someone who knows how to be deterred. Nobody has been born in the world who can deter the Pakistani state," the DG ISPR declared.

"We are here and we will remain here. Pakistan is here, Balochistan is here and the people of Balochistan are here," he asserted.

The military spokesman vowed to "take on each and every terrorist, their facilitators, those who harbour them, those who furnish them, those who provide them bases, wherever they are, without any distinction".

"Don't expect any sort of rationality and proportionality from us if you are going to touch our kids, our brave policemen, our soldiers and our innocent citizens. And then you think we will adopt rationality and proportionality and will hold a dialogue with you?" he said.

Concluding his press briefing, the DG ISPR stressed that the security forces, LEAs, and the people were fighting the war against terrorism and will "achieve victory in it under all circumstances because we are on the rightful path, are standing on the truth and to protect ourselves".

Security forces praised for response to attacks

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised the security forces' bravery and professionalism for "sending 54 terrorists of FAH to hell in three days".

In a statement, he also paid tribute to the 42 personnel and civilians who lost their lives in the incidents.

"The brave sons of our dear homeland foiled the nefarious designs of Indian-sponsored terrorists by taking timely action," Naqvi was quoted as saying.

Terming the martyrs "pride of the entire nation", the minister said their sacrifices expressed the nation's firm resolve against terrorism.

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti also lauded the bravery, professionalism, and timely actions of security forces.

In a statement, CM Bugti expressed satisfaction over the performance of the army, Balochistan Police, FC, and other LEAs, describing their efforts as a testament to their dedication and skill.

He said recent terrorist incidents were part of a "planned and malicious conspiracy" aimed at destabilising Pakistan's peace, progress, and national unity. However, he emphasised that the state, the government, and people possess the strength and resolve to defeat every such plot.

Bugti noted that attempts to undermine Balochistan's peace and development through terrorism had failed in the past and would continue to fail.

He highlighted that the courageous response of security personnel had "proven that Pakistan's defenders are fully capable of confronting any threat".

Paying tribute to the martyrs, CM Bugti said their sacrifices were a source of pride for the entire country.

He reaffirmed that indiscriminate action will continue against terrorists, their facilitators, and patrons, stressing that no one will be allowed to sabotage Balochistan's peace, future, or ongoing development.

"Balochistan is the soul and pride of Pakistan," he declared.

He asserted that the provincial government was utilising all available resources to protect lives and property, establish lasting peace, and ensure comprehensive development.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 08, 2026

HRCP highlights systemic corruption in justice system

- **Report alleges state capture of superior judiciary**
- **Calls for repeal of 26th, 27th amendments**
- **Favouritism, nepotism cited as major concerns**

LAHORE: A new report by the International Federation for Human Rights and one of its member organisations, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, has pointed out widespread and systemic corruption at all levels of Pakistan's justice system, with grave consequences for human rights.

The 32-page report, titled 'Under the Bench: Mapping corruption risks in Pakistan's justice system', details the multifaceted ways in which corruption, described as endemic throughout Pakistan's judicial system, has affected the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and its ability to uphold fair trial rights and protect other fundamental freedoms.

The report suggests there are indications that judicial corruption in Pakistan has reached a systemic scale and may amount to grand corruption.

"This report shows the extent to which corruption has become entrenched in all aspects of the judiciary, and the insidious impacts it has on the enjoyment of human rights. Far from being a victimless crime, corruption in the judiciary has demonstrably curtailed the right to fair trial, particularly for the most vulnerable, such as minorities," said FIDH Secretary General Shahindha Ismail.

The report is based on 30 interviews conducted by FIDH and HRCP with lawyers, journalists, civil society activists, academics and judges.

It details how corruption is manifested in the judiciary, including as a result of the weak administration of justice, which leads to various forms of bribery and corrupt behaviour; cultural dynamics conducive to favouritism and nepotism; and the erosion of judicial independence, resulting in state capture of the superior judiciary.

The report notes that the recent 26th and 27th constitutional amendments have heavily diluted the limited independence previously enjoyed by the judiciary by altering judicial appointments and expanding the grounds for judicial removal.

It also examines the failure of existing anti-corruption mechanisms to provide accountability and deter future acts of corruption.

In particular, the report examines the human rights impacts of corruption in the judiciary. These include violations of the rights to due process and equality before the law, particularly for low-income communities and minorities; the link between corruption and the incidence of torture and the application of capital punishment; and the impact of corruption on gender equality within the legal profession and judiciary.

“Eradicating the risks of corruption in the judiciary at all levels will require much more than just increasing judges’ emoluments and perks or installing CCTV cameras in the courtroom — it needs to start with a comprehensive approach to restoring judicial independence and addressing the underlying factors that contribute to inappropriate practices and compromised judicial decisions,” said HRCP Secretary-General Harris Khalique.

The report provides a series of recommendations related to judicial corruption, including those aimed at addressing the weak administration of justice, increasing transparency, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and protecting whistleblowers.

Among its recommendations, the report calls on Pakistani authorities to repeal the 26th and 27th constitutional amendments, introduce transparent and rule-based case allocation systems, publish court fees and hearing schedules online, require judges at all levels to publicly declare their assets, livestream Supreme Court hearings of public importance, establish clear timelines for investigating complaints against judges, strengthen judicial accountability mechanisms and enact comprehensive federal legislation to protect whistleblowers.

The report also recommends repealing laws that criminalise freedom of expression, including the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), preventing the misuse of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), regulating intelligence agencies through legislation and ensuring effective remedies for victims of corruption.

Beyond Pakistan, FIDH and HRCP urged the European Union to include judicial corruption in its monitoring of Pakistan’s compliance with GSP+ commitments, while recommending that the International Monetary Fund incorporate judicial governance reforms into future programme benchmarks.

The report also calls on civil society organisations and donors to expand documentation of corruption-related human rights violations, support strategic litigation and fund legal assistance programmes for whistleblowers.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 9TH, 2026

Senate panel grills NCCIA over delay in cybercrime complaints

- **Summons agency's chief for briefing on online portal, enforcement timelines**
- **Senators seek briefing on revised mechanism for registration of blasphemy FIRs**

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights expressed concern over the delay in processing of complaints by the National Cybercrime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) and the technical issues with its online complaint portal.

In its meeting chaired by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri, the body reviewed the NCCIA performance, delays in cybercrime complaint redressal, the procedure being followed in blasphemy-related cases and progress in the murder case of Lahore resident Ahmed Javed.

Senator Quratulain Marri informed the meeting that a sustained online campaign had been launched against her and her family on social media, and that no effective action had been taken despite the filing of a formal complaint through legal counsel.

The NCCIA officials told the committee that technical and operational constraints had affected the online complaint system. They said written complaints could also be submitted through legal representatives for immediate processing while remedial work on the portal was underway. The committee was also informed that action regarding blocking or restricting objectionable online content was generally completed within 15 days.

Senator Zehri expressed dissatisfaction over the delay, questioning that whether complainant should be left helpless due to technical excuses. Senator Rana Mahmoodul Hassan, too, echoed the same sentiments.

In view of these concerns, the committee decided to summon the NCCIA director general in its July 17 meeting for a briefing on status of the online complaint portal, delays in complaint processing, enforcement timelines, response protocols, and measures being taken to improve the performance.

Blasphemy cases

The committee also received a briefing from the Punjab home secretary on blasphemy cases. The meeting was apprised that a special committee constituted to examine such cases had met twice. The secretary said an inter-agency coordination mechanism had also been established to strengthen prosecution, improve coordination and streamline legal proceedings.

The committee was told that online blasphemy-related content was being monitored through a dedicated monitoring centre and actionable reports were forwarded to the PTA for action.

Senator Zehri sought a detailed briefing on the revised mechanism for registration of FIRs in blasphemy cases.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 9TH, 2026

335 Pakistanis perish chasing Europe dream

ISLAMABAD: At least 335 Pakistanis have lost their lives while attempting to reach Europe through illegal migration routes since June 2023, with seven deadly migrant boat disasters claiming hundreds of lives.

According to documents obtained by The Express Tribune from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), 467 Pakistanis were aboard the seven boats involved in the reported disasters. Of them, 335 died, while 131 survived.

The records show that Greece-and Libya-bound routes have accounted for most of the casualties, with boats departing from Libya alone claiming the lives of 71 Pakistanis.

According to the documents, the deadliest tragedy occurred in June 2023, when a boat carrying migrants to Greece capsized. A total of 226 Pakistanis were aboard, of whom 207 died, while only 19 survived.

Another boat carrying migrants to Greece met with disaster in December 2024, with 69 Pakistanis on board. The incident claimed the lives of 25 Pakistanis, while 44 were rescued.

In January 2025, a boat carrying 70 Pakistanis capsized near Morocco. The documents state that 32 passengers died, while 38 survived.

The FIA records show that most of the recent tragedies occurred off the Libyan coast. Since February 2025, four major boat disasters have been reported near Libya, resulting in the deaths of 71 Pakistanis.

In one such incident in February 2025, authorities identified 40 Pakistani victims. According to the documents, 23 Pakistanis died, while 13 survived.

The documents further state that boat disasters occurring in February, April and October 2025, as well as April 2026, affected 102 Pakistanis. Across these Libya-linked incidents, 71 Pakistanis lost their lives, while 30 survived.

The latest tragedy occurred in April 2026, when another migrant boat capsized off the Libyan coast. The accident claimed the lives of 45 Pakistanis, while 12 others survived.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JULY 13, 2026

Poverty punished

THE challenge of illegal migrations should be viewed through a humanitarian lens. Harsh punishments for the poor overlook human misery, and end up criminalising poverty. Although collective global efforts have tried to end modern slavery, the scourge rooted largely in the government's economic failure persists with thousands being trafficked annually. Over the past couple of weeks or so, Gujranwala, Gujrat and Sialkot courts have sentenced over 60 deportees — largely from Libya and Greece — to 10- to 15-day jail terms, with fines as high as Rs50,000. The FIA has imposed a five-year ban on foreign travel for the offenders. While disciplinary action is needed for illegal immigrants, sending the desperate to prison is merely a band-aid on a metastatic malaise.

People who brave treacherous waters in rickety boats in their pursuit of a better life abroad are not criminals but victims of dire socioeconomic conditions. Treating the indigent harshly is not effective. It is, in fact, a distraction from the absence of social welfare policies. The state must guarantee the rights of victims of human trafficking and smuggling so that they choose to stay. It must counter corruption, powerful patronage, legal loopholes and the culture of criminal impunity. Without an institutional overhaul, databanks, training, funds and incentives for law-enforcement, toxic transnational cartels will expand. The West, responsible for most conflicts, can fork out a fraction of its expenditure on wars to secure sufferers, while those escaping our moribund economy should be facilitated for instance, by raising their outrageously low wages. The traps of trafficking rings widen as poverty and turmoil grow as revealed in the 2025 IOM report: at least 2,722 illegal migrants from the Asia-Pacific region died or went missing, with Pakistan's score standing at a disturbing 109. When rulers undercut citizens' living standards, and allow predators to get away with fines, the blame cannot be pinned on the victims.

Source: Dawn, July 14th, 2026

Report: Judicial corruption in Pakistan 'systemic'

ISLAMABAD: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has warned that judicial corruption in Pakistan has reached a systemic scale and may amount to grand corruption, saying the country's justice system has become increasingly vulnerable to political influence and institutional capture.

The organisation made the observations in a report titled "Under the Bench: Mapping Corruption Risks in Pakistan's Justice System."

According to the executive summary, Pakistan's democratic institutions, including the judiciary, have come under increasing pressure over the past several years and have been subjected to gradual weakening and capture by the executive branch.

"This has been accompanied by severe repression of fundamental freedoms, facilitated by repressive legislation and grave violations of human rights. In this context, the judiciary has become a tool for repression and silencing of activists and dissidents," the report states.

The report says the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments have had a significant negative impact on judicial independence and the protection of fair trial rights in Pakistan.

"These developments mark a regressive shift in Pakistan's legal and constitutional order by completely stripping the limited independence previously enjoyed by the judiciary," it says.

According to the report, judicial appointments, bench formation and high-level case management are now subject to political influence in ways that contradict international standards for judicial independence.

It further states that these structural distortions at the apex level have also affected the lower judiciary, where judges are influenced by higher courts regarding their conduct and decision-making, increasing the potential for external pressure.

The report recommends repealing both constitutional amendments to restore judicial independence.

Examining judicial corruption, the report states that corruption has become endemic throughout Pakistan's judicial system, undermining the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and its ability to uphold fair trial rights and protect fundamental freedoms.

It identifies three interrelated factors enabling corruption: weak administration of justice across all levels of the judicial system leading to bribery and corrupt practices; cultural dynamics that encourage favouritism and nepotism; and the erosion of judicial independence, which has resulted in what it describes as state capture of the superior judiciary.

The report also examines what it calls the failure of existing accountability mechanisms to investigate allegations of corruption effectively and hold those responsible accountable.

It argues that accountability institutions have increasingly been politicised and used as tools for political victimisation rather than as mechanisms to address systemic corruption. It highlights the lack of protection for whistleblowers amid growing restrictions on freedom of expression and shrinking civic space.

According to the report, judicial corruption has serious human rights implications, including violations of due process and equality before the law, particularly affecting low-income communities and minorities.

It also links corruption to the incidence of torture and the application of capital punishment and highlights its adverse impact on gender equality within both the legal profession and the judiciary.

"The report concludes that there are indications that judicial corruption in Pakistan has reached a systemic scale and may amount to grand corruption," it states.

It also offers a series of recommendations aimed at addressing weaknesses in the administration of justice, improving transparency, strengthening accountability mechanisms, ensuring action against perpetrators of corruption and protecting whistleblowers.

The report says its findings are based on interviews with 30 interlocutors, including four women, who possess knowledge of Pakistan's justice system. Those interviewed included lawyers, former and retired judges—including two former chief justices of Pakistan, former Supreme Court judges and a former high court judge—as well as journalists and representatives of civil society organisations.

The report further states that attacks on judicial independence and fundamental freedoms have been compounded by widespread corruption across public institutions.

Citing Transparency International Pakistan's 2025 National Corruption Perception Survey, the report says the police are perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country, while the judiciary ranks third nationally.

The FIDH is an international human rights NGO federating nearly 200 member organisations. Since 1922, the FIDH has been defending all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to its website.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JULY 15, 2026

Human smugglers adopt new Europe routes

ISLAMABAD: Human traffickers have established new transit routes for illegally smuggling Pakistanis into Europe after intensified enforcement made traditional "Dunki" routes increasingly difficult to use, according to Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) sources.

Investigators said arrested human smugglers had disclosed several new routes that now pass through countries including Malaysia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Uzbekistan and Belarus.

In response, the FIA has tightened scrutiny of passengers travelling to these destinations, with suspected illegal migrants being offloaded from flights.

According to FIA sources, one of the newly identified routes involves transporting Pakistani nationals to Malaysia on valid visas before moving them onward to Egypt and Libya and eventually facilitating their illegal entry into Europe.

Another emerging route begins with obtaining visas for Uzbekistan, from where migrants are transported to Belarus before being smuggled across the border into Poland.

Sources said the Poland border is crossed through difficult overland terrain before migrants continue their journey deeper into Europe.

A third route takes migrants to Mauritania and Senegal, from where they are transported by boat to Spain's semi-autonomous Canary Islands.

According to sources, migrants are then moved illegally from the Canary Islands into mainland Spain. The islands are located only about 100 kilometres off the northwest coast of Africa, making them a key gateway for irregular migration into Europe.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JULY 17, 2026

FIA sets up cryptocurrency investigation unit

- **Will prevent use of virtual currency for money laundering, terror financing**
- **Director calls for squads to curb crypto use in cybercrime, drug trade**
- **Over 300 human trafficking cases registered in two years**

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has established a cryptocurrency investigation unit housed in its newly operational National Com-m-and and Control Centre (NC3) to prevent money laundering and terrorism financing through virtual currency transactions.

FIA Counter-Terrorism Wing Director Dr Muhammad Athar Waheed told Dawn that while the newly established Pakistan Virt-ual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA) was the dedicated authority responsible for regulating digital assets, the cryptocurrency investigation unit would probe the possible use of digital assets in crimes.

The official suggested that the National Cyber Crime Investi-gation Agency (NCCIA) and Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) should also establish similar units to tackle the use of cryptocurrency for cybercrimes and drug-related business. He said new rules were being framed to ensure time-bound completion of all inquiries.

"With the introduction of several reform initiatives, the FIA has already demonstrated significant improvement in its performance, and we expect a number of additional key projects to be completed over the next six months," he said. According to Dr Waheed, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi played a pivotal role in strengthening the FIA by providing the support needed to modernise the agency.

Single platform for coordination

Speaking about NC3, he said the centre provided a unified platform for monitoring, intelligence fusion, inter-agency coordination and nationwide operational support and brought key operational units on a single command platform. Its Immigration Monitoring Unit and Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) provide real-time oversight of traveller movements, biometric verification and screening at all ports of entry and exit.

The Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Desk coordinates intelligence-led operations against organised smuggling networks, while the Risk Analysis Unit identifies high-risk individuals, suspicious travel patterns and emerging threats.

To strengthen investigations into financial crimes, NC3 houses dedicated anti-money laundering (AML) and virtual currency inves-tigation units. The Interpol Desk serves as Pakistan's national coordination point for international law enforcement cooperation.

Similarly, officials said the case management system (CMS) enables real-time monitoring of investigations and performance across the FIA formations nationwide.

The centre also enhances public service delivery through a 24/7 helpline, a complaint management unit and overseas complaints cell, ensuring timely assistance to citizens and overseas Pakistanis. "Its intelligence capabilities are further reinforced by open source intelligence (OSINT), cellular detection, cyber patrolling and dark web investigation units, which support intelligence gathering, lawful technical analysis and the detection of cyber-enabled and transnational crimes," an official said.

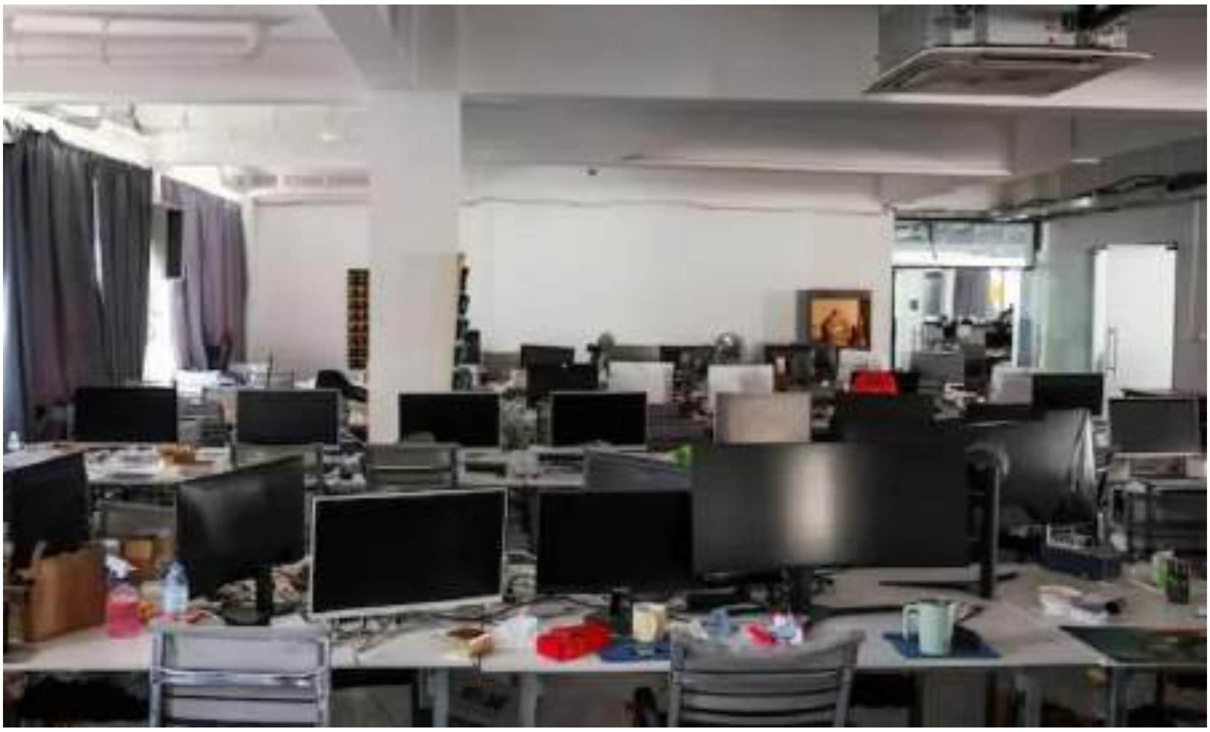
A centralised daily situation report (DSR) and an operational support desk provide senior leadership with real-time situational awareness and nationwide operational coordination.

Meanwhile, to protect FIA investigators, special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams have also been formed as raiding parties, while a large number of vehicles have been added to the FIA fleet. Officials said international collaboration was also being improved and a new post of the International Coordination director had been created. "Many new things are in the pipeline. Recruitment of around 1,300 officials is in progress while more recruitment will be made in the future," an official said. For the welfare of FIA employees, rules of the Punjab police have also been adopted.

Another official said that during the past two years, over 300 FIRs were registered against human trafficking, with 258 agents arrested and significant recoveries made. "We have busted many gangs involved in human trafficking; as a result, the incidents of boat tragedies are witnessing a decline," the official claimed.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 21ST, 2026

Scam victims lost $114bn in Asia, Australia in 2025: UN



BANGKOK: Victims of transnational online scams in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand lost up to $114.1 billion last year, a UN report said, with estimated losses at least tripling from 2023.

Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia and Myanmar, has emerged as a regional hub for crime syndicates running fake romance and cryptocurrency investment schemes in which scammers — some willing, others trafficked — often working in fortified compounds defraud internet users around the world.

Online scams, mostly from investment fraud, across the specified regions cost victims an estimated $88.3 billion to $114.1 billion last year, according to the new report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The combined losses far exceed the $18 billion-$37 billion estimated to have been lost in 2023, and reflect "the dramatic scaling of this criminal economy", it said.

China, South Korea and Taiwan reported the largest losses from scams in the region in the past two years, each losing billions of dollars, the report said.

Global spread

The cyberscam industry has ballooned in Southeast Asia in recent years, with organised criminal groups initially mostly targeting Chinese speakers before widening their reach and targeting victims globally. They also recruit and traffic scammers from around the world, with individuals from at least 80 countries and territories found in scam compounds across the Mekong region, the report said.

AI-powered translation tools have made it easier to reach new audiences but recruits still post advertisements for staff speaking German, Polish, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, French, Swedish and Norwegian, as well as English, it said.

And when the scam centres are raided by authorities, some of the foreigners who work there take their newfound skills back home. Under pressure from several countries, including the United States, Britain and China, authorities in the region say they are cracking down on the illicit industry.

Several alleged scam network bosses were extradited from Cambodia to China in the past year, after Washington and London sanctioned firms and individuals accused of operating far-reaching cyberscams fuelled by human trafficking.

The report authors said many operations continue despite the arrest of the kingpins, and that some of those released from raided centres take their skills elsewhere.

"It's always a bit of a thin distinction between victims and whoever has been using their presence in the group to acquire criminal expertise that they're going to be able to sell," UNODC regional representative Delphine Schantz said.

"They're going back to their country of origin and they're tapping into some existing criminal networks," she told a news conference, noting that this was happening in Africa as well as Europe, particularly in the Balkans.

Criminal ecosystem

The scam centres are only one part of a wider criminal ecosystem in Southeast Asia that has been transformed over the past decade, the UNODC said. It encompasses the illegal drug trade — mostly methamphetamine — as well as child sexual exploitation and real estate investment, working through existing trade routes and hiding behind cryptocurrencies, the report said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 22ND, 2026

NCCIA busts embassy impersonation gang, arrests 12 members in Punjab

LAHORE: The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has unearthed an international network involved in impersonating foreign embassies' officials to defraud citizens seeking visas and immigration services, arresting its 12 members. "We have busted an international cyber fraud network that had been impersonating foreign embassies' officials, including those in Italy, Germany, Sweden, Oman and Saudi Arabia, for the last several years to defraud visa and immigration applicants of millions of rupees," NCCIA Punjab Director Muhammad Ali Wasim said.

Flanked by NCCIA Additional Director Hassam Bin Iqbal, Mr Wasim told a press conference that 12 members of this gang had been arrested. The arrests were made during a raid on a fake call centre operating from Bahria Town Phase IV in Rawalpindi, he said, describing the operation as one of its most significant crackdowns on organised cross-border cybercrime.

"The suspects would create fake Google business profiles, bogus websites and forge official documents to impersonate staff of foreign diplomatic missions. The gang manipulated online search results so that victims seeking embassy contact details were redirected to fraudulent phone numbers controlled by the suspects," the director said. Similarly, he said the suspects employed advanced call-forwarding and caller ID spoofing technologies to route official embassy telephone numbers to their own lines.

"Posing as embassy officials, they would contact victims through phone calls and WhatsApp, demanding hefty payments for visa appointments, immigration processing, document verification and other purported consular services." The NCCIA Punjab chief further said the network also used intimidation tactics to gain the confidence of victims.

"Members of the gang appeared in video calls wearing Singapore Police uniforms and falsely claimed to be law enforcement officials. The group's mastermind had also recruited individuals fluent in Arabic, including the Saudi dialect, and other foreign languages to strengthen the deception by posing as embassy staff and government representatives," he said. According to him, the network had been active since 2019 and expanded its operations to Oman and Saudi Arabia. "Efforts are underway to trace the group's financial transactions, identify additional victims, arrest absconding suspects and investigate its international links," Wasim said.

The operation was carried out by the NCCIA's Gujranwala Circle.

The NCCIA had seized 21 mobile phones, a car, a Singapore Police uniform, forged appointment letters, phishing emails, fake Google business profiles, PTCL records, multiple gmail accounts and other digital evidence, all of which have been sent for forensic examination. Wasim said the agency would continue pursuing cybercrime networks targeting the public and exploiting the names of government institutions and foreign diplomatic missions. "There is no place for those who undermine public trust or attempt to use the country's territory for international cyber fraud," he added.

Separately, the NCCIA arrested two alleged key members of an international cyber fraud network accused of operating a sophisticated phishing infrastructure used to steal banking credentials and other sensitive data from victims in Pakistan and abroad.

It said the suspects had developed and operated Tycoon2FA, a phishing platform comprising more than 96,000 fake applications, accounts and malicious links used by cybercriminals in Pakistan, North and South America, Central Asia and Europe. According to the NCCIA, the suspects used counterfeit banking websites and webpages mimicking government institutions and private companies to obtain victims' usernames, passwords, one-time passwords (OTPs) and banking details through phishing links sent via email, SMS and WhatsApp.

The agency said coordinated raids in Islamabad, Faisalabad and Sialkot led to the seizure of computers, laptops, servers, mobile phones and digital storage devices from suspects. It said proceeds of the alleged fraud had been invested in high-value properties in Islamabad, adding that legal proceedings had been initiated to confiscate the assets.

According to the NCCIA, four other suspects have fled abroad and the process of obtaining Interpol Red Notices for their arrest is underway.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 22ND, 2026

FIA partners with Meta to expedite cybercrime investigation

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has established a direct, official communication channel with Meta Asia Pacific (APAC) to accelerate investigations into organised cybercrime, online fraud, and hate speech.

Under the agreement, Meta formally recognised the FIA's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) based at the National Command and Control Centre (NC3), allowing secure, lawful coordination for data requests concerning Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Previously, the federal agency had to route requests through Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) or Interpol channels, a process that often took months. Officials say the new mechanism will cut response time to days. All lawful requests will now be processed exclusively through NC3.

These include preservation requests, basic subscriber information, acc-ount registration details, login IP history, content removal requests, and emergency disclosure requests. As per the procedure, the Investigating Officer will compile the case with all requisite legal documents and relevant Meta account identifiers. After scrutiny and approval by the Circle In-charge, the request will be forwarded to the FIA's official SPOC at NC3, who will submit it to Meta APAC through the established channel. "All requests will be routed through a single, designated channel to ensure accountability, audit trail and speed," an FIA official said.

FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwar said the channel would "significantly enhance our capacity to respond to time-sensitive cases involving terrorism and child exploitation".

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 23RD, 2026

Adopting AI may cut banking fraud

KARACHI: As scams are increasing day by day, the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) could significantly reduce fraud and cyber scams in Pakistan's banking sector by enabling financial institutions to detect suspicious transactions in real time and prevent financial losses for customers and banks, industry experts say. According to the Banking Mohtasib Pakistan, complaints related to banking fraud have continued to rise despite various preventive measures introduced by regulators and financial institutions. The number of fraud-related complaints increased to 4,615 in 2025 from 4,171 in 2024 and 3,489 in 2023, highlighting an alarming trend in cybercrimes.

Pakistan's financial inclusion gains are increasingly intertwined with cybersecurity challenges. The State Bank of Pakistan's Pakistan Financial Inclusion Index (P-FII) for 2024 rose to 58.1 from 54.8 a year earlier, driven by stronger access (72.3) and usage (62.5) of digital and conventional financial services. Account ownership now stands at 67% of the adult population, thanks to expanded digital banking, mobile wallets and payment channels.

Yet the quality sub-index remains the weakest at 43.9, highlighting gaps in service standards, literacy and equitable reach. As more citizens and businesses shift to digital finance, the same infrastructure that enables inclusion also expands the attack surface for cyber threats, including fraud, data breaches and disruptions to payment systems. The SBP's National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2024-28 prioritises quality financial services. Securing these services through robust cybersecurity frameworks, stronger consumer protection and coordinated efforts with bodies such as PKCERT (Pakistan Computer Emergency Response Team) is essential. Without adequate safeguards, rapid digitalisation that has lifted access and usage risks eroding public trust and undermining the very inclusion gains recorded so far.

Balancing expansion with resilience will determine whether financial inclusion delivers lasting economic benefits. The rapid digitisation of Pakistan's financial system has made banking services faster, more convenient and widely accessible. However, it has also exposed customers and financial institutions to an increasing number of cyber threats, including phishing attacks, identity theft, payment fraud and account takeovers.

Artificial intelligence experts believe banks should accelerate the deployment of AI-powered fraud detection systems to combat the increasing number of digital scams while strengthening coordination with law enforcement agencies to identify and prosecute cybercriminals.

Muhammad Waleed, an AI quality engineering expert, said AI applications not only improve operational efficiency through automation but also play a critical role in detecting and preventing financial fraud. He said commercial banks should invest in advanced technologies such as AI and machine learning to strengthen their fraud detection capabilities. He added that regulators, banks, digital financial service providers and other stakeholders should also enhance their technical capacity to effectively deploy AI-based monitoring systems. "Artificial intelligence has transformed fraud detection by leveraging machine learning, deep learning and big data analytics to improve both speed and accuracy," Waleed said.

AI-powered systems can analyse millions of transactions in real time, identify unusual behavioural patterns and detect potentially fraudulent activities with far greater accuracy than conventional rule-based monitoring systems, he added. Pakistan's banking sector has witnessed a surge in digital fraud in recent years, with phishing campaigns, fake social media advertisements, UAN spoofing and identity theft among the most common tactics used by cybercriminals to steal customers' credentials and gain unauthorised access to bank accounts.

According to cybersecurity company CTM360, phishing attacks in Pakistan increased tenfold between 2019 and 2023, while other cyber threats, including malware infections, stolen credentials and payment card data leaks, increased eightfold during the same period. Abdus Samad Khan, Chief Executive Officer of iPath, said Pakistani banks should modernise their fraud management frameworks by integrating AI-driven technologies across the financial ecosystem, including commercial banks, branchless banking providers and fintech companies. He said cybercriminals continuously evolve their techniques to bypass conventional fraud detection systems, making it essential for financial institutions to adopt intelligent systems capable of learning and responding to new threats in real time. "As digital financial services continue to expand, fraud management systems must also evolve through continuous testing, regular system upgrades and feedback from cybersecurity experts and customers," he said.

Experts stressed that investment in technology alone would not be sufficient. They called on banks to strengthen financial literacy and customer awareness programmes, educate users about emerging cyber threats and improve collaboration with law enforcement agencies. They said a combination of advanced AI technologies, stronger regulatory oversight and greater public awareness would be essential to safeguarding Pakistan's rapidly growing digital banking ecosystem.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JULY 26, 2026

Ambitious AI steps

MOHIUDDIN AAZIM

Pakistan's information technology sector has reached a milestone that deserves appreciation.

During FY26, IT and information and communication technology export earnings reached a record $4.6 billion, rising 21 per cent from $3.8bn in FY25. The sector generated a trade surplus of $3.9bn in this sub-sector of services trade, according to Federal Minister for IT & Telecom Shaza Khawaja. It was the highest ever trade surplus among Pakistan's services sectors.

IT exports now account for roughly 11.7pc of total exports, making it one of Pakistan's most important sources of foreign exchange and a significant export industry.

The significance becomes clearer given Pakistan's narrow export base. Traditional exports remain concentrated in textiles and food, while IT and IT-enabled services (ITeS) can expand without heavy dependence on imported raw materials, physical logistics or expensive infrastructure.

Under the Uraan Pakistan plan, the target is to raise IT exports to $10bn by FY29. According to Topline Securities, this requires a compound annual growth rate of 29.5pc through FY29, which is significantly higher than the 21pc growth recorded in FY26.

Achieving this objective will require not just more people entering the industry but a transformation in the quality and sophistication of services Pakistan sells.

The country urgently requires sustainable foreign exchange. Merchandise exports ($69.76bn) almost entirely consume combined foreign exchange earned through goods exports ($30.14bn) and remittances ($41.59bn). That is why external debt repayments often necessitate fresh borrowing and rollovers, resulting in a persistent external financing gap and keeping the country's balance of payments out of shape. The State Bank of Pakistan recently reported a $1.83bn balance of payment deficit in FY26.

Digital services offer one of the fastest routes to earn foreign exchange without shipping containers, maintaining large inventories or importing heavy machinery. Freelancer earnings in FY26 grew 78pc to $1.76bn in the outgoing fiscal year, according to a recent Dawn report. Crucially, the sector creates high-value employment for a young population and converts human intelligence into an internationally tradable asset.

However, Pakistan cannot build a durable economy merely by increasing low-value exports. It must move towards higher productivity and value addition. IT and ITeS can bridge Pakistan's youth population to the global economy, but only if the country develops companies capable of selling complete technological solutions, managing international projects, creating IP and building globally recognised brands. The objective should be a globally competitive digital economy.

The next phase of transformation will be determined by how quickly Pakistan adapts to AI. AI will transform agriculture, manufacturing, banking, healthcare, logistics and governance through analytics, automation and intelligent decision-making. Pakistani companies that ignore AI will compete against faster, cheaper, and more intelligent producers. The question is whether Pakistan will use AI to increase productivity or merely consume technologies created elsewhere.

This applies even more urgently to IT and ITeS. AI will replace some routine work but create greater demand for those using AI to deliver sophisticated services. An AI-assisted engineer can do what once required several engineers; an equipped BPO worker can serve more customers.

The opportunity lies in selling human-plus-AI capability. Pakistan produces tens of thousands of IT professionals annually — one of the region's largest talent pools. We must teach AI across universities and workplaces, aiming to export not just digital labour but AI-enhanced solutions.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan's decision to become a founding member of the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (Waico) deserves close attention. Domestic reforms alone will not suffice; Pakistan must participate in international institutions shaping AI's future.

Waico is an intergovernmental body, headquartered in Shanghai and launched in July 2026, to advance AI governance, capacity-building and equitable access for developing nations. The agreement was signed on July 16 at the World AI Conference, with UN chief António Guterres attending.

Pakistan is among Waico's 29 founding members, alongside China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Indonesia and several other Global South nations. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar signed the agreement. Islamabad pledged to bridge the global AI divide with fellow members. During Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's May 2026 visit to China, Pakistan formally backed the Waico proposal, agreeing to deepen bilateral AI, digital economy and innovation cooperation.

The real value of founding membership depends on what Pakistan does with it. Membership alone won't create an AI industry. Pakistan must use Waico to expand computing infrastructure, strengthen AI education, promote joint research, facilitate tech transfer, attract venture capital, and create international market access for local firms. Waico should be a platform to achieve the $10bn IT export target by FY29.

The country has already taken significant steps. The National AI Policy (2025) designates AI a national priority. In February 2026, the government committed $1bn by 2030 to expand sovereign computing and research.

The Sino-Pak Centre for AI at Haripur and the National Centre of AI (NCAI) at the National University of Sciences & Technology are advancing education, research and development. The Regulation of AI Act 2024 provides legal grounding, while the National AI Fund (NAIF) fuels industrial integration.

For Pakistan, Waico's window is significant. The country possesses a large young population, a growing IT export sector and an expanding community of software professionals. What it still lacks is sufficient scale, advanced research capacity, computing infrastructure, investment and broader global market access. Waico can help address these constraints if Pakistan approaches its membership with ambition, preparation and clear strategic objectives.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 27TH, 2026

End trafficking

MODERN slavery, in the form of human trafficking, is among the state's gravest failures. Scores of Pakistanis are trafficked annually, yet the conviction rate for those who traffick them remains low. This World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, under the theme 'Trapped behind a scam', focuses on the rising "form of trafficking in persons for forced criminality". It is linked to financial scams, corruption, money-laundering and cybercrime. The UN drugs and crime agency says that, at present, over 300,000 people are stuck in Southeast Asia's scam centres. While the region has long been a hub of the menace, the extent of the criminal network became apparent last year when victims from 80 countries were identified. UNODC wants more measures, including cross-border judicial and law-enforcement support, to protect victims and dismantle transnational crime rings.

Human traffickers thrive amidst conflict and socioeconomic despair. Desperate people fall for fake job offers placed through 'legal' companies, followed by 'professional' interviews and contracts. But their destination is a cruel scam compound where they face isolation, threats, debt bondage, torture and sexual abuse. Pakistan should take this as a warning, and collaborate with Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka in their attempts to end this kind of trafficking. For this, it is essential for the state to accept that a culture of impunity is forcing the poor out. Besides the lack of job opportunities, corrupt officers, legal loopholes, political patronage and weak enforcement of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018, and the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act, 2018, create miserable conditions. The need for reforms is dire, as is the training and resourcing of security forces all focused on victim safety and rehabilitation. The brutality of human trade does not invite public outrage because the government has been unsuccessful in raising awareness. As a result, the country has compromised cititzens' safety and diminished its international image.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 30TH, 2026

Plan to prevent movement of terrorists, smugglers and aliens across Sindh-Balochistan border

KARACHI / QUETTA: Senior police officials from Sindh and Balochistan agreed to increase security along the border of the two provinces by constructing new check posts and carrying out joint operations to curb terrorism, smuggling and illegal immigrants' movement.

The meeting of the officers was held in the Hub industrial town and marked the first formal joint strategy session between the Sindh and Balochistan police leadership on border security and coordinated law enforcement.

The meeting was attended by Additional Inspector General Karachi Azad Khan, Additional IG Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Zulfiqar Larak, DIG West Irfan Baloch, DIG Asad Raza, SSP West Tariq Elahi Mastoi, SSP Keamari Singhar Malik, and SSP CTD Irfan Bahadur from Sindh police.

Balochistan was represented by DIG Kalat Range Wazir Khan Nasar, SSP Hub Mirza Bilal Hassan, DSP Hub Imam Baloch, and Special Branch Regional Officer Zulfiqar Baloch.

The police officials of both the provinces discussed measures to prevent the movement of terrorists, smugglers and undocumented people across the Sindh-Balochistan border.

They reviewed proposals to introduce joint police patrols from both provinces on highways and other routes connecting Sindh and Balochistan.

The meeting approved the construction of new security check posts in strategic border areas to improve surveillance and strengthen law enforcement coordination.

The officers pledged to enhance intelligence sharing and inter-provincial coordination in future operations aimed at combating crime and maintaining security.

It was decided that the next coordination meeting between the two provincial police forces will be held in Sindh.

Karachi police chief Azad Khan told Dawn that they would hold regular meetings to take 'practical steps' against drug and weapons smugglers.

He said it had been noticed that vehicles stolen in Karachi were being taken to and sold in Balochistan and a cell had been formed in order to check this menace.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 30TH, 2026

Resilience against organised crime

TARIQ PARVEZ

IN recent years, Pakistan has taken many steps to combat organised crime (OC); resultantly, it was taken off the FATF grey list in 2022. However, it remains on the FATF's 'enhanced follow-up' list in order to assess the sustained, on-the-ground implementation of its anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) steps.

Thus, our current status with the FATF requires us continuously to assess the implementation and effectiveness of our ongoing efforts against OC.

Tackling OC can be divided into two broad areas, ie, targeting criminality (criminal markets and actors) and strengthening society's resilience against OC. While the first area focuses on intelligence, law enforcement and punitive measures, the second centres on addressing the contextual factors that provide an environment conducive to OC. This is the model followed by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime in its successive Global Organised Crime Indices (GOCI). While not infallible, these global indices serve at least as rough-and-ready comparative assessments across different fields.

In its latest GOCI, issued in 2025, Pakistan has been placed in 45th position out of 193 countries, ie, in the category of countries with high vulnerability to OC and low resilience to combat it. That is a grave indictment of Pakistan's efforts. It indicates that despite our ongoing policies, we not only remain extremely vulnerable to OC, but our will or capability to reduce the contextual factors sustaining it also remains very weak. This calls for a fundamental review of the balance between targeting criminality and strengthening resilience, which should complement each other.

While a lot has been written about efforts to deal with OC's criminality (criminal markets and criminal actors), the subject of building resilience against OC in society has received little attention. GOCI 2025 has highlighted the following five areas of greatest weakness in building resilience against OC in Pakistan:

Political leadership and governance: The most important factor for building resilience against OC in any society is the quality of its political leadership and governance. Both these factors have been assessed by GOCI 2025 as having a non-existent or nominal role in building resilience in Pakistan. In fact, when political leadership and governance fail to play their due role, they not only facilitate OC but also weaken the government's efforts to combat it. Four factors have been specifically identified in this regard. One, a lack of trust in state institutions because the controversial elections of 2024 weakened the government's legitimacy. Two, political interference in law enforcement. Three, widespread corruption in the system. Four, the military's retention of "substantial control over political processes". It follows that improving the quality of political leadership and governance deserves the highest priority in building resilience against OC.

Judicial system and detention: The ability of any judicial system to dispense justice is crucial to building resilience against OC. Pakistan's judiciary has been assessed by the indices as "weak and subject to political influence, with the military often shaping judicial outcomes". Also, the latest Transparency International report has assessed the judiciary as the third most corrupt institution in the country. Working in such a judicial system makes combating OC difficult. Government transparency and accountability: Countries with higher government transparency and greater accountability have been found to be more successful in combating OC. For Pakistan, the index has assessed both these factors as ineffective. The 2026 World Press Freedom Index has ranked Pakistan 153rd out of 180 countries — among the lowest 20 per cent in the world. In such an environment, it is risky for investigative journalists to publish reports about major scandals. Similarly, where accountability is concerned, organisations mandated to deal with corruption, like NAB, have been criticised "for political bias, often pursuing opposition leaders while protecting those aligned with the ruling establishment". Interestingly, the 2025 Global Index on Fraud places Pakistan 112th out of 112 countries — in other words, it is the most permissive country in the world for fraudulent practices. OC thrives in such a society, and its main enablers continue largely unharmed, reducing the effectiveness of the law-enforcement agencies.

Economic regulatory capacity: Since OC is a form of criminal enterprise with the sole objective of making money through illegal activities economic regulatory institutions like SECP assume great importance. The GOCI ranks the capacity of Pakistan's economic regulatory agencies very low. SECP's recent initiative to develop a central registry of UBOs (ultimate beneficiary owners) this year is welcome. Its effectiveness on the ground, however, remains to be seen. There is a greater need for public scrutiny of agencies like SECP and for holding them accountable. Victim and witness support: Another important pillar of the strategy to build resilience against OC is the extent of security provided to witnesses and victims of OC. In Pakistan, this is an example of technical compliance with FATF standards but with poor implementation. Every province has had specific witness protection laws for years; yet these laws have rarely been used and the witnesses have rarely been provided security, undermining the effectiveness of law-enforcement efforts and leading to non-reporting of OC and large-scale acquittals by the courts. The protection of witnesses needs to be given the importance it deserves.

The cumulative effect of the weaknesses of these five crucial areas is the creation of an environment conducive to the spread of OC. Combating OC in such a context is like fighting in hostile territory. The situation calls for national action plans by the AML authority in each of these five areas and regular monitoring with regard to specific key performance indicators. In the interest of transparency and accountability, the implementation reports of these action plans should be made public.

Strategically speaking, in the fight against OC, action against criminality and the effort to build resilience must go hand in hand. Ignoring one at the cost of the other is self-defeating. The sooner this is realised, the better it will be otherwise, our successes shall continue to be merely tactical and the dents in OC shall remain superficial.

SOURCE: DAWN, JULY 31ST, 2026

112 security personnel martyred in July

ISLAMABAD: Violence linked to terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations intensified sharply in July, making it the deadliest month of 2026, with 112 security personnel among 205 people killed, while 401 terrorists were eliminated.

The Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), an Islamabad-based think tank, said in its monthly security assessment that fatalities among security personnel and terrorists rose substantially during the month as terrorist violence increased and security forces intensified counter-terrorism operations.

According to the report, at least 112 security personnel lost their lives during July, the highest monthly toll since January 2023 and the second-highest recorded in more than a decade.

In January 2023, 114 security personnel were martyred, including around 102 in the suicide bombing at Peshawar Police Lines, the report recalled.

It said 401 terrorists were killed during July, the highest number recorded in a single month in more than a decade.

On the other hand, 74 civilians and 19 members of peace committees lost their lives during the month. The death toll among peace committee members was also the highest recorded in a single month during the past decade.

According to PICSS, the 232 injuries recorded during July included 101 security personnel, 103 civilians, 14 peace committee members and 14 terrorists.

Compared with June, security personnel deaths increased by 195%, rising from 38 to 112. Terrorist deaths increased by 109%, from 192 to 401, while civilian deaths rose by 21%, from 61 to 74.

The institute recorded at least eight suicide attacks during July, including five vehicle-borne suicide attacks. The think tank noted that this was the highest number of suicide attacks recorded in a single month during the past decade.

Kidnapping incidents also doubled during the month, rising by 100% from 33 in June to 66 in July.

The security situation deteriorated most significantly in Balochistan, where the overall death toll increased by 241%, from 109 in June to 372 in July.

Security personnel deaths in Balochistan increased from six in June to 62 in July, representing a rise of 933%. Terrorist deaths rose from 75 to 238, while civilian deaths increased by 93%, from 28 to 54. Eighteen members of peace committees were also killed in the province.

According to the report, mainland Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, excluding the merged districts, recorded 154 deaths in July, compared with 75 in June, representing a 105% increase. The number of people injured rose from 60 to 98.

Security personnel deaths in mainland K-P increased from 12 to 38, while terrorist deaths rose by 192%, from 37 to 108. Civilian deaths, however, declined by 73%, falling from 26 in June to seven. One member of a peace committee was also killed in the province.

The data showed a slight decline in overall deaths in the merged districts of K-P, where 79 people were killed in July compared with 85 in June.

The number of people injured in the merged districts declined by 37%, from 60 to 38. Security personnel deaths increased from six to 11, while terrorist deaths declined by 24%, from 72 to 55. Civilian deaths rose by 86%, increasing from seven to 13.

In Sindh, PICSS recorded two terrorist attacks in which one security personnel member was killed. The province had recorded 12 deaths in June. Security forces also arrested six suspected terrorists during counter-terrorism operations in Sindh.

Punjab, Islamabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan witnessed no terrorist violence during July. However, security forces arrested three suspected terrorists during operations conducted in Punjab.

Overall, the data showed that the first seven months of 2026 witnessed 2,786 deaths linked to terrorist violence and counter-terrorism operations.

Those killed included 1,857 terrorists, 463 civilians, 434 security personnel and 32 members of peace committees. The average monthly martyrdoms among security personnel increased from 56 in 2025 to 62 in 2026, while average monthly civilian deaths rose from 48 to 66, and average monthly terrorist deaths increased from 178 to 265.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 02, 2026

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