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Violence-linked deaths surge 83pc

Ikram Junaidi



An army personnel walks amid the rubble following an explosion inside the police headquarters at Kohat in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on September 18, 2026. — AFP

- **Balochistan accounts for nearly 59pc of total fatalities in third quarter of 2026**
- **CRSS records 1,415 deaths, 558 injuries across 385 incidents**
- **TTP becomes deadliest group, inflicting 117 deaths**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan recor-ded a sharp 83 per cent increase in violence-linked fatalities during the third quarter of 2026, re--versing a declining trend reported in the first and second quarters as terrorism and counter-terrorism deaths surged nationwide.

The escalation, according to a report by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), was largely driven by Balochistan, where fatalities more than tripled and the province accounted for nea--rly 88pc of the national increase.

The southwestern province overtook Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the country's worst-hit region in both violence-related deaths and recorded incidents.

The CRSS report recorded at least 1,415 violence-linked fatalities and 558 injuries among civilians, security personnel and outlaws during Q3 2026, across 385 incidents involving terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations.

Balochistan and KP remained the epicentres of violence, jointly accounting for 98pc of all fatalities during the period. Balochistan recorded 829 deaths, nearly 59pc of the national total, while KP reported 556 fatalities, accounting for more than 39pc.

Balochistan also witnessed the highest number of violent incidents, with 186 cases, representing more than 48pc of all incidents recorded in the quarter. KP followed closely with 173 incidents, or nearly 45pc of the total.

However, KP suffered the highest number of injuries, with 376 cases, while Balochistan recorded 163 injuries.

The report said the surge from Q2 to Q3 marked the highest escalation in violence since 2021, ending the declining quarter-on-qua-rter trend observed during the first and second quarters of 2026.

The increase was primarily lin-ked to Balochistan, where fatalities jumped 213pc compared with the previous quarter, rising from 265 deaths in Q2 to 829 in Q3. KP also recorded a rise in violence, with fatalities increasing by more than 17pc, from 475 to 556.

Outlaws accounted for the majority of deaths, with 921 fatalities, or more than 65pc of the total, following nearly 154 security operations. Their deaths more than doubled, increasing by 103pc from 453 in Q2 to 921 in Q3.

However, the rise was not limited to militant fatalities. Civilian deaths increased by nearly 36pc, from 187 to 254, while security personnel fatalities rose by more than 79pc, from 134 to 240. Combined civilian and security personnel deaths climbed by nearly 54pc, reaching 494.

Among groups claiming resp-o-nsibility for attacks, the TTP emerged as the deadliest in Q3 2026, with 13 claimed attacks causing 117 deaths and 65 injuries.

The BLA claimed five attacks that killed 34 people and injured 42, while HGB-IUM claimed three attacks that caused 27 fatalities and 129 injuries, the highest injury toll among the listed groups.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 2ND, 2026

Over 546 held for human trafficking in August

IFTIKHAR A. KHAN



Undated image shows a person in handcuffs.— AFP/File

ISLAMABAD: With an intensified drive to dismantle human smuggling and trafficking networks underway, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested 512 human smugglers and 34 human traffickers across the country during the month of August.

According to consolidated monthly crime data obtained from FIA's Directorate of Anti-Human Smuggling, the arrested individuals included one most wanted trafficker listed in the red book.

The data shows the agency received 2,295 complaints related to human smuggling and trafficking during August, and registered 2,180 inquiries. Following scrutiny, 991 cases were registered, and challans in 355 cases were submitted to the courts.

Convictions were secured in 180 cases. Authorities also arrested 84 proclaimed offenders and three court absconders. A total of 18 red notices were issued to help arrest suspects who had fled abroad.

The FIA also sent 46 requests for mutual legal assistance related to money laundering and sought one extradition. During August, 15 court absconders were declared proclaimed offenders. The names of 13 individuals were placed on the Exit Control List (ECL), while 102 were added to the Provisional National Identification List (PNIL).

An official said FIA Director General Dr Usman Anwer and Director of the Anti-Human Smuggling Unit Asmatullah Junejo have issued clear instructions to all Anti-Human Trafficking Circles across the country to make every effort to dismantle human trafficking networks.

"The FIA's Anti-Human Trafficking Circles have intensified operations against human smuggling and trafficking across the country. Figures for August 2026 provide a clear example of these efforts," he said.

He further stated that the FIA regularly received referrals from international law enforcement agencies.

In August, it received 10 such referrals, and 12 cases were registered from among 117 pending referrals. Asmatullah Junejo explained that human trafficking and human smuggling were not the same.

"Human trafficking is a crime involving the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception with the purpose of exploitation of victims through forced labour, sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse.

"Migrant smuggling is the facilitation of irregular entry into a country where the person has no legal right to enter or remain," he remarked.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 7TH, 2026

Pakistan Navy conducts 2 counter-narcotics operations, seizes drugs worth $96m



Pakistan Navy personnel display seized narcotics following two counter-narcotics operations in the Arabian Sea.

The Pakistan Navy seized narcotics worth approximately $96 million during two successful counter-narcotics operations while deployed in the Arabian Sea, the military's media wing said.

In a press release, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said Pakistan Navy Ship Yarmook conducted the operations "at extended ranges from [the] Pakistani coast, resulting in [the] successful seizure of a large cache of narcotics".

"During the operations, two dhows were intercepted, and approximately 850 kilogrammes of ice and 2,000kg of hashish/cannabis were recovered from concealed compartments inside the vessels," it said.

The seized narcotics, valued at approximately $96m, were taken into custody and will subsequently be handed over to the authorities concerned for further disposal and legal proceedings, according to ISPR.

"The successful operations reflect the Pakistan Navy's sustained presence, vigilance and commitment to regional maritime security and the fight against illicit trafficking at sea," the statement concluded.

President Asif Ali Zardari paid tribute to the Pakistan Navy for its successful counter-narcotics operations in the Arabian Sea.

In a statement, he said that the "navy's role in preventing illegal activities within the country's maritime boundaries and safeguarding regional maritime security was commendable".

He commended the navy's continuous vigilance, readiness and resolve against illicit drug smuggling at sea.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also paid tribute to Pakistan Navy for its "successful and timely" operations.

In a statement, he said the navy's role in regional maritime security and in preventing illegal activities at sea was commendable.

Last month, the Pakistan Navy seized narcotics worth approximately $750m during a joint counter-narcotics operation in the Arabian Sea. The operation was conducted by Pakistan Navy ships Hunain and Yarmook under the ambit of maritime security operations.

In June, the navy seized around two tonnes of drugs — 1,500kg of hashish and 500kg of ice — near the coastline of Gwadar. The value of seized drugs was estimated at around $215m in the international market.

In October last year, the navy seized narcotics worth more than $972m from sailboats in the Arabian Sea.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 07, 2026

Prison population climbs to 110,513 as three-fourths of inmates under trial



Undated image shows inmates inside a prison cell. — AFP/File

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's prison population has reached 110,513, with three out of every four prisoners awaiting trial, according to the Annual Prisons Data Report 2026, jointly compiled by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Justice Project Pakistan (JPP).

The report, launched on Thursday at a local hotel with the support of the European Union, found that prisons across the country were operating at over 160pc of their authorised capacity. Against a capacity of around 68,832 inmates, the prison system was holding 41,681 more people than it was designed to accommodate.

Of the total prison population, 82,988, or 75pc, were under-trial prisoners. Their number alone exceeded the country's total authorised prison capacity by 14,156.

The report, in its second edition, brought together official prison data from across the country to examine trends in incarceration, overcrowding, under-trial detention, bail, trial delays and the use of alternatives to imprisonment.

Chairperson NCHR Rabiya Javeri Agha said the country did not simply face a prison overcrowding problem but a broader criminal justice crisis. "People enter prison faster than our justice system can process them," she said, calling for greater attention to prolonged detention, delays in trials, barriers to bail and the limited use of alternatives to imprisonment.

Drug-related offences had also emerged as a major factor behind the growth in the prison population. More than 28,000 people were currently imprisoned under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, accounting for more than a quarter of all prisoners.

The report recorded an increase of over 43pc in the number of people imprisoned under drug laws since 2023, highlighting the role of drug-related prosecutions in driving prison overcrowding.

The situation, however, varied considerably between provinces. While Punjab and Sindh had experienced significant surges in their prison populations and continued to face severe overcrowding, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan had reduced their prison populations and remained within their overall authorised capacity.

According to the report, greater use of probation, parole, diversion and other alternatives to imprisonment had contributed to the reduction in the two provinces. The report also highlighted growing pressure on vulnerable groups. The number of women in prison had increased by 45.96pc since 2024, while 86.2pc of children in prison were awaiting trial.

At the same time, the country's death-row population had declined to 3,220, representing an 11.7pc reduction from 2024. Justice Project Pakistan Executive Director Sarah Belal said the data should be used to guide reforms in the criminal justice system.

EU Delegation in Pakistan Head of Partnerships Jeroen Willems said prison management reflected how society treated people in state custody and stressed the need for evidence-based reforms to strengthen access to justice.

The report called for measures to reduce unnecessary detention, reform bail and surety practices, address delays in trials, expand non-custodial alternatives and strengthen prison oversight. It also recommended reviewing laws and policies that contributed to unnecessary incarceration.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 9TH, 2026

17-year jail term each for two human traffickers in Gujranwala

GUJRAT: The special judge (central), Gujranwala, handed down a 17-year rigorous imprisonment, besides a fine of Rs1.1 million, each, to two human traffickers.

According to the prosecution, the convicts — Hamza Ashraf and Arslan — along with two others, were booked in a case (595/2025) on the charges of receiving a sum of Rs3.8 million from the complainant, for sending his brother-in-law to Europe.

However, the complainant's brother-in-law was sent to Turkiye, where he was forcibly kept in a safe house and was also subjected to severe physical torture. The victim has been missing since then.

The two other suspects in the case — Sufiyan and Qasim — are at large.

The case was lodged by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Gujranwala circle after arrest of the two convicts.

The judge awarded a three-year imprisonment and Rs300,000 fine each to both convicts under Section 17 of the Immigration Ordinance 1979, as well as a seven-year term and Rs500,000 fine each under Section 22 of the same ordinance. They were also handed down a seven-year term and Rs 300,000 fine each under Section 6 of the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act 2018.

The judge also announced a six-year additional imprisonment for the convicts in case of non-payment of the fine amount.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 9TH, 2026

Supreme Court releases report documenting judicial, institutional reforms

NASIR IQBAL

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan (SC) has released its report, "Journey Through Reform and Innovation 2026", documenting the judicial and institutional reforms undertaken from November 2024 to September 2026.

The report provides a comprehensive account of the SC's reform efforts, highlighting progress in case management, reducing the backlog of pending cases, digital transformation, institutional accountability and public access to justice.

It documents the implementation of an 86-point Reform Action Plan, supported by a structured governance mechanism, dedicated working groups and regular reviews of reform initiatives.

The report also records measurable progress in judicial performance, including a substantial increase in case disposals, greater focus on long-pending cases, expanded digital services and stronger data-driven performance monitoring.

It also highlights key national initiatives advanced through the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee, including time-bound disposal of prioritised cases, establishment of Model Trial Courts, responsible use of artificial intelligence and the development of judicial analytics.

Significant progress has also been made in modernising judicial procedures, improving access to court services and strengthening institutional collaboration.

The report further documents initiatives aimed at facilitating litigants, enhancing transparency, expanding international judicial cooperation and promoting a more responsive justice system.

The document serves as an institutional record of the reform process, capturing both measurable achievements and the continuing work required to strengthen the efficiency, accessibility, predictability and responsiveness of justice delivery in Pakistan.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 10, 2026

Turkiye inks pact to enhance anti-terror cooperation



by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and his Turkish counterpart Mustafa Ciftci in Istanbul sign a pact on Friday, Oct 9.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Turkiye signed an agreement to enhance cooperation in combating terrorism, narcotics trafficking and organised crime and agreed to establish a Joint Working Group to strengthen collaboration between their interior ministries.



The decisions were taken during a meeting between Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and his Turkish counterpart Mustafa Çiftçi at the Turkish Ministry of Interior in Istanbul, according to information received here through the interior ministry's media wing.

Both sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation through technical assistance, exchange of experts and joint initiatives in the fields of cyber policing, Anti-Narcotics Force, National Police Academy and other relevant areas.

During the meeting, Mr Naqvi briefed his Turkish counterpart on the positive results of Pakistan's crackdown against the illegal immigration mafia.

The Turkish interior minister said that the rate of illegal immigration from Pakistan to Turkiye had declined from 70 per cent to 17pc, appreciated Pakistan's measures and acknowledged the remarkable reduction.

Both interior ministers reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening bilateral cooperation.

Earlier, Mr Naqvi arrived in Istanbul on an official visit to Turkiye, where he received a warm welcome at the airport.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 10TH, 2026

The lost civilian CT body

MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

THIS is an obituary for the National Counter Terrorism Authority, once conceived as a civilian counterterrorism body that combined policymaking, coordination among law-enforcement agencies, and data collection and processing.

Since its inception in December 2008, and even after gaining legal cover under the Nacta Act, 2013, it has struggled to fully realise its role and mandate, while facing resistance from LEAs reluctant to coordinate with a police-led body.

Appointing a senior military officer as its national coordinator was not the first deviation from the Nacta Act. A bigger departure from the statute had come in 2025 with the establishment of the National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre. Niftac was created as a parallel body, apparently under Nacta but in effect superior to it, even though Nacta is the statutory body. This gave a superior security institution the leading role.

Nacta's new form seems to have little to do with developing a counterterrorism strategy, building a coordination mechanism, or taking on a CT-related operational role. Its real purpose is to synchronise all civilian-led LEAs with the superior security institution, and, at the very least, to bring them under one roof. This synchronisation of internal security policy with the security doctrine conceived by the establishment's top brass has been underway for a long time, taking various forms. Bureaucrats see it in the National Security and War Course (NSWC) at the National Defence University (NDU), which is now equivalent to the National Management Course, a mandatory course for promotion from Grade 20 to 21.

The NSWC gives senior bureaucrats more opportunities to align with evolving thinking at the top levels of the security institutions. At the narrative level, NDU and many other military-led institutions run short courses for opinion-makers, politicians, and business and community leaders to align them with the new thought process. Interestingly, all these courses and discourses happen at the expense of civilian governments, whether provincial or federal.

One may argue that synchronisation within the internal security structure will improve coordination, the very dream for which Nacta was conceived. However, the new changes appear to be aimed at control, and the CT body is being used as an instrument of that. The structures of other LEAs, such as the police and FIA, leave little room for intervention by other institutions — unlike Nacta.

Admittedly, Nacta had a few good leaders who clearly understood the terrorism challenge facing the country and how to respond. But it is safe to say that most of its heads, and even others who served in the authority, had little idea of the CT body's objectives. Many came on deputation, or to rest before landing a field posting.

As mentioned earlier, Nacta faced pressure and challenges from superior security institutions, which were reluctant to work under or with a civilian-led body. Still, the police cadre is

undoubtedly responsible for destroying the institution and providing an excuse for its takeover. This did not happen overnight. The process began much earlier. When former prime minister Imran Khan chaired the Nacta board of governors meeting in September 2018, as required by law, two key realities emerged. One, he was the first prime minister to convene a board meeting since the Act was passed, even though quarterly meetings were required. Two, the national coordinator at the time recommended that the prime minister dissolve the body, as it had no use or role in countering terrorism in the country.

This was the first and last board meeting held under the original Act. In July 2019, parliament amended it through an ordinance, which it later passed in March 2020. The amendment made the interior minister the board chairman and the national coordinator its secretary. Several references to the "prime minister" in the Act were also replaced, shifting Nacta's reporting line to the interior ministry. The 2019-2020 amendments thus downgraded Nacta from a prime minister-led federal-provincial body to one under the interior minister. Interestingly, one of the few board meetings held since then, and chaired by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, approved the establishment of Niftac. Just before Niftac was introduced, Nacta inducted around 130 permanent officers. Since Niftac's establishment, most have struggled to find a role.

Niftac was described as a national platform connecting more than 50 federal and provincial departments and agencies — supported by provincial fusion centres — to improve intelligence coordination, speed up threat assessment, and strengthen information-sharing across institutional boundaries. That was Nacta's purpose.

A military or intelligence institution can possess information that a civilian authority cannot access. It can conduct operations a civilian institution cannot. It can assess threats from a classified perspective. But the state also needs an institution that can sit openly with provincial police, civil administration, prosecutors, courts, parliamentarians, researchers and international partners. It needs an institution whose authority is intelligible within the civilian legal and administrative system.

Against this backdrop, Niftac overshadowed Nacta. Even before Maj Gen Faisal Naseer was appointed national coordinator, Niftac and its officers from the superior security institutions appeared more assertive and powerful than the national coordinator.

In fact, Nacta, the only civilian-led CT body, struggled to find its role and eventually lost that struggle. Now the vision and implementation plan will flow top-down, and space for consultation, policy discourse, and debate will gradually vanish.

This institutional transformation is taking place at a time when Pakistan faces its worst terrorism challenge, one that is growing more complex by the day. The state is trying hard to find a way out of the menace, but these transformations will not solve it. Concentrating power in one set of hands can be challenging because absolute control centralises the burden.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 11TH, 2026

A security master policy

SHAUKAT JAVED

Pakistan is facing a grave and persistent challenge from terrorism and insurgency.

The Global Terrorism Index 2026 ranked Pakistan first among the countries most affected by terrorism in 2025, recording 1,045 incidents and 1,139 deaths. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan bore the brunt of the violence. These figures demand an urgent reassessment of Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy and its implementation.

Pakistan does not lack policies. It has the National Security Policy (NSP) 2022, the Revised National Action Plan (NAP), the National Prevention of Violent Extremism (NPVE) Policy 2024 and Azm-e-Istehkam. The problem is that these initiatives have not been integrated into a coherent national framework. The NSP, intended to provide the overarching security vision, appears to have receded from the centre of policy implementation. The result is a fragmented response, with overlapping objectives and an unclear chain of responsibility.

Pakistan must move from four separate frameworks to one legally backed national security strategy. Parliament should provide the legislative foundation for a comprehensive Master Policy that integrates these initiatives, assigns institutional responsibilities and makes implementation measurable and accountable. Another announcement or administrative directive will not suffice. The country needs a framework that ensures policy continuity beyond political changes.

Each initiative has a distinct contribution. The NSP provides the strategic vision, linking national security with economic stability and human security. The revised NAP defines counterterrorism priorities and institutional tasks. The NPVE Policy addresses radicalisation, extremist narratives and prevention, while Azm-e-Istehkam facilitates coordinated action across intelligence, security, political, diplomatic and legal domains. Integrating them would eliminate duplication, close policy gaps and align resources behind common objectives.

The strategy must recognise that military action remains indispensable against armed groups, but it cannot deliver lasting peace on its own. Intelligence-led operations can disrupt terrorist networks and clear territory, but only effective policing, prosecution, governance and public services can prevent militants from returning. Pakistan requires both the tactical capacity to defeat immediate threats and the civilian institutions to consolidate the gains.

This calls for strengthening the National Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta), whose statutory mandate includes coordinating counterterrorism and counterextremism strategies and reviewing their implementation. Nacta should be developed into an autonomous, professionally staffed, civilian-led coordinating authority, operating under a dedicated National Security Advisor (NSA).

The NSA should be an experienced political leader, a retired senior military commander or a seasoned civilian bureaucrat or technocrat, appointed for the requisite expertise and ability to coordinate national security policy. The head of Nacta could also serve as ex officio secretary

of the National Security Division. These arrangements would require appropriate institutional and legal changes. Nacta must have the authority and resources to coordinate the national effort without encroaching upon the operational responsibilities of individual agencies.

Intelligence coordination must be central to this framework. Police, provincial Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), Special Branches, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), the Intelligence Bureau, the Federal Investigation Agency and other security agencies possess different pieces of the intelligence picture. These must be fused into timely, actionable assessments. The National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre (NIFTAC) and its provincial counterparts (PIFTACs) should facilitate this process within a clearly defined national framework, avoiding competing jurisdictions and institutional silos. The objective must be to identify and disrupt threats before attacks occur, rather than merely investigate them afterwards.

Operational activity alone is not a reliable measure of success. The number of militants killed, arrests made or hideouts destroyed says little about whether the threat has been durably reduced. Provincial CTDs need modern investigative capabilities, forensic support, specialised training and adequate resources. Equally urgent is criminal justice reform. Deficiencies in the law, weak investigations, inadequate evidence and delayed trials can undermine successful operations. Better coordination between investigators and prosecutors, witness protection and timely trials are essential to ensure that arrests lead to lawful convictions. Counterterrorism must reinforce rule of law, not compromise it.

The Master Policy should assign every major task to a lead institution, identify supporting agencies, provide adequate funding and establish measurable performance indicators. Nacta should monitor implementation and report regularly to the federal leadership, while parliament scrutinises progress and demands explanations for persistent failures. Success must be measured by reductions in attacks, disruption of terrorist financing, successful prosecutions and the restoration of lasting civilian authority.

The state must also be able to hold territory after security operations. Local government, policing, justice and public services should be restored promptly so that communities are not left vulnerable to intimidation or militant re-entry. Federal and provincial governments should agree on transparent performance benchmarks, linking federal assistance for agreed programmes, where constitutionally and fiscally permissible, to verified progress. Essential public services must be protected, and citizens should not bear the cost of institutional failures.

In Balochistan, security operations must be accompanied by meaningful political engagement, representative governance and equitable resource distribution. Peaceful political movements and legitimate grievances must be distinguished from armed insurgency. Treating dissent as synonymous with militancy risks deepening alienation and weakening public cooperation.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the merged districts, effective local government, education, healthcare, employment and infrastructure must complement security operations. Development commitments require transparent funding and delivery, not merely

announcements. Communities must experience the state's presence through justice, public services and security, ensuring cleared areas do not become vulnerable to militant re-entry.

Prevention must also address terrorism's ideological and financial foundations. Religious scholars, educators, community leaders and credible media voices should help challenge extremist narratives and promote peaceful political participation. Appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programmes can reduce the risk of individuals returning to violence. Financial intelligence and inter-agency investigations must identify and disrupt the networks that finance, equip and facilitate terrorist organisations.

Border management requires similar attention. Unfenced stretches should be secured, damaged sections of the border fence repaired and surveillance strengthened. Regulated crossing points should facilitate legitimate trade and movement while preventing militant infiltration. Engagement with Afghanistan is essential to address cross-border militancy and promote lawful commerce.

Pakistan's armed forces, police and citizens have made immense sacrifices in confronting terrorism. The challenge is to translate these sacrifices into durable security. Repeated operations cannot replace a strategy that integrates intelligence, law enforcement, political engagement, development and prevention.

The answer lies in bringing existing initiatives under a single, legally grounded framework, with Nacta coordinating implementation and parliament ensuring accountability. Pakistan needs one strategy, one chain of responsibility and an unwavering commitment to execution. Only then can it move from reacting to attacks towards preventing terrorism and building lasting national security.

SOURCE: THE NEWS, OCTOBER 13, 2026

PM Shehbaz reaffirms commitment to strengthening Pakistan-EU ties

IFTIKHAR A. KHANSYED IRFAN RAZA



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meets European Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner in Islamabad on Oct 12.

ISLAMABAD: European Union Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to discuss strengthening Pakistan-EU cooperation in migration and mobility, one of the eight pillars of the Pakistan-EU Strategic Engagement Plan 2019.

Welcoming Commissioner Brunner on his first visit to Pakistan, the prime minister underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to its partnership with the EU.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening cooperation across all pillars of the Pakistan-EU Strategic Engagement Plan.

The prime minister highlighted Pakistan's sustained efforts to curb irregular migration and combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking through legislative reforms, institutional strengthening, effective enforcement and international cooperation.

He emphasised that efforts to address irregular migration should be complemented by practical opportunities for safe, orderly and regular migration.

PM Shehbaz noted that expanding legal pathways for Pakistani skilled workers and professionals would help meet the labour market needs of European countries while reducing prospective migrants' vulnerability to smuggling networks.

Brunner appreciated the measures taken and cooperation extended by the government of Pakistan.

He expressed confidence that these efforts would contribute to expanding legal migration pathways and promoting mutually beneficial labour mobility between Pakistan and the European Union.

Naqvi, EU commissioner discuss border security

Separately, Naqvi and Brunner held a meeting in Islamabad, during which they discussed enhancing cooperation in border security, legal migration and border management. The meeting was followed by delegation-level talks.

Brunner appreciated Pakistan's measures against illegal migration, describing the 64 per cent reduction in illegal migration to Europe resulting from the country's efforts as commendable.



He said the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) had demonstrated professional competence despite limited resources, which was commendable. He added that the decline in illegal migration would pave the way for legal migration.

Naqvi said Pakistan had adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards illegal migration.

"After a 64 per cent reduction in illegal migration, our next target is its complete elimination," the interior minister said, describing illegal migration as a serious global issue.

The two sides also discussed the promotion of legal migration and enhancing opportunities for skilled workforce between Pakistan and the European Union.

Both sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation in immigration, institutional coordination and border management, and to work together on the EU's Eastern Corridor Initiative to eliminate illegal migration.

They also discussed increasing mutual cooperation to enhance the capacity of Pakistan Coast Guards and agreed to increase collaboration to promote border security and legal migration.

Brunner assured Pakistan of all possible cooperation in this regard.

The meeting was attended by the interior secretary, special and additional interior secretaries, FIA director general, Federal Constabulary inspector general, NCCIA director general, passports director general, Islamabad chief commissioner and other officials.

Last month, Naqvi said Pakistan had recorded a 64pc reduction in illegal migration to Europe, describing the achievement as challenging despite limited resources.

He said Pakistan's next target was to eliminate illegal migration completely, stressing the need to expand legal migration opportunities, adopt modern technology and strengthen institutional capacity.

In February, Pakistan and three European countries, Italy, Spain and Greece, reached a consensus on promoting legal pathways to "effectively combat illegal migration". The three countries endorsed Naqvi's proposal to establish legal pathways as a strategy to combat illegal migration and human smuggling during a conference.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 13, 2026

Anti-terror finance controls tightened

KALBE ALI

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has issued a Guidebook on Targeted Fina-ncial Sanctions (TFS) to help prevent terrorist financing and other illicit activity while safeguarding the integrity of Pakistan's financial system.

The guidebook explains, in practical terms, the steps regulated entities should take to meet their obligations under applicable TFS requirements.

These include screening customers, prospective customers and beneficial owners against relevant sanctions lists and notifications; assessing potential matches; freezing the funds and assets of designated persons and entities without delay; and reporting to the relevant authorities within the required time.

It also highlights the need for clear internal procedures, regular screening, proper record-keeping, staff awareness and effective compliance controls.

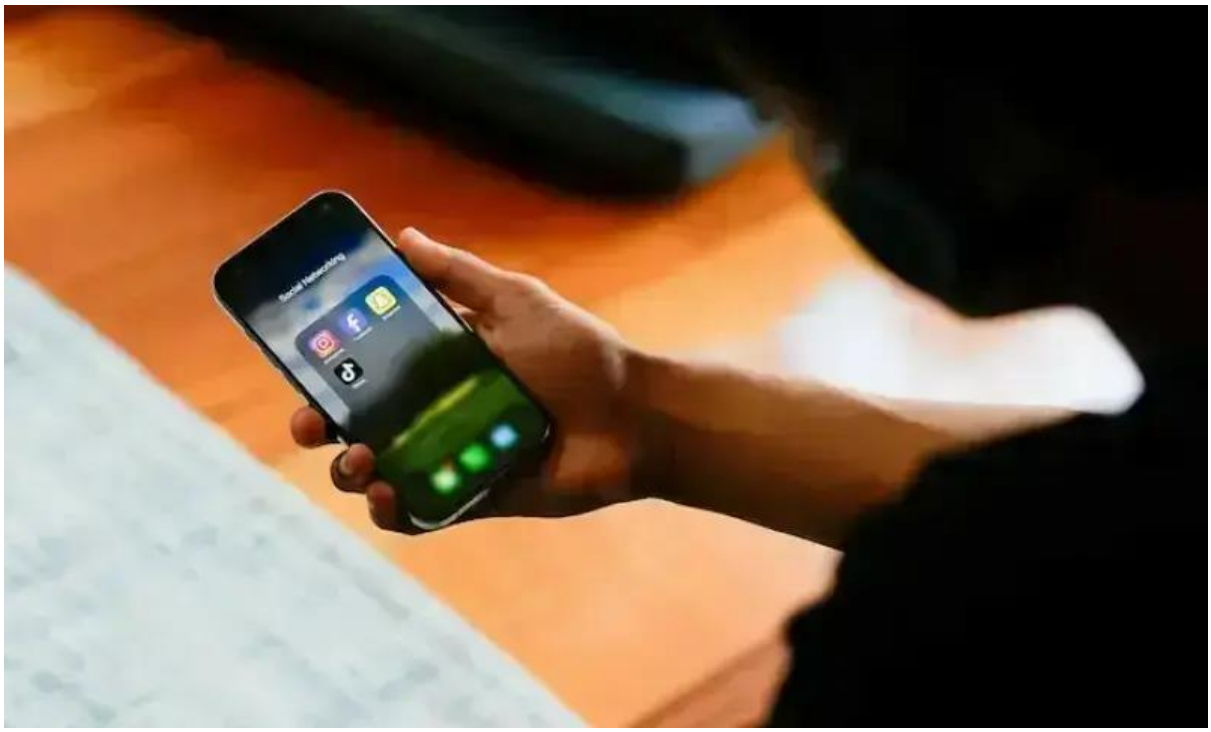
SECP encourages regulated entities to use the guidebook to review and strengthen their existing arrangements. The guidebook follows a series of TFS awareness sessions for SECP-regulated entities, conducted by SECP in collaboration with the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA).

The sessions and guidebook support stronger understanding and implementation of Pakistan's Anti-Money Laundering, Coun-tering Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation Financing (AML/CFT/PF) framework.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 14TH, 2026

Online abuse puts 1.5m Pakistani children at risk: study

ANWAR IQBAL



A high school student poses with his mobile phone showing his social media applications in Melbourne, Australia on November 28. — Reuters/File

WASHINGTON: About 1.5 million internet-using children in Pakistan experienced sexual exploitation or abuse facilitated by digital technology in a single year, according to new research, as a senior United Nations official warns that artificial intelligence and overlapping global crises are creating new dangers for children.

Presenting her final report to the UN General Assembly, Najat Maalla M'jid, the secretary general's Special Representative on Violence Against Children, urged governments to strengthen protections for children facing multiple and overlapping crises.

"Almost 45 million children are displaced because of conflict, but also because of natural disasters, because of the climate crisis," she told journalists at UN Headquarters in New York. Rapid advances in technology are creating new risks alongside opportunities for children to learn and communicate. Artificial intelligence has opened what Ms M'jid described as "huge avenues for child sexual exploitation", as well as "cyberbullying, deepfakes and the recruitment of children into criminal activities."

Her presentation marked 20 years since the first UN global study on violence against children. Despite progress, she warned, the world continued to face complex and overlapping crises in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Troubling picture

Nearly one in 16 internet-using children aged 12 to 17 in Pakistan — approximately 1.5 million children experienced at least one form of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse in a single year, according to Disrupting Harm in Pakistan, a study published by Unicef, ECPAT International and INTERPOL in September 2026.

The UN General Assembly on Monday identified AI-generated sexual material as an emerging risk. The abuses include unwanted sexual images or conversations, demands for intimate photographs, the non-consensual sharing of children's images, and sexual threats or blackmail.

The findings challenge the perception that online abuse is mainly perpetrated by strangers. In 85 per cent of the incidents cited by children, the perpetrator was someone they alre-ady knew. Social media accounted for 44pc of reported instances of abuse, making it the most commonly reported digital setting.

Fear, stigma and possible repercussions at home often prevent children from seeking help. Victims may fear being blamed, humiliated or subjected to restrictions by their families. Boys, too, risk being overlooked because of social expectations about masculinity and the reluctance to discuss sexual abuse.

Unicef says more than half of children who experienced technology-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse did not tell anyone. None of the children surveyed reported their experiences through formal channels such as helplines, social workers or the police.

These findings highlight the need for safe, confidential and accessible reporting systems, as well as support that allows children to seek help without fear of blame or punishment.

Poverty and displacement

Online abuse is part of a wider child-protection challenge shaped by poverty, displacement and disrupted access to essential services. Ms M'jid warned that poverty, food insecurity and rising prices were deepening children's vulnerability worldwide. Economic hardship can expose children to exploitation, while conflict and natural disasters can disrupt education and weaken family support systems.

Climate-related emergencies add to these pressures across South Asia. Unicef estimates that weather-related disasters displaced 15.6m children in the region between 2016 and 2022. In Bangladesh, climate-related events disrupted schooling for 35m children in 2024.

These figures concern different aspects of children's vulnerability; they do not establish a direct link bet-w--een displacement and online sexual abuse. They nevertheless underline the importance of maintaining child-protection services during emergencies and ensuring that vulnerable families can access support.

For Pakistan, the challenge is to address both the risks created by digital technologies and the social and economic circumstances that can leave children without adequate protection. The Pakistani study identifies weaknesses in the systems intended to prevent online abuse,

investigate cas-es and support victims. Children need safe and accessible ways to rep-ort abuse, while investigations must be conducted by appropriately trained personnel. Victims must also be able to obtain support without being exposed to further humiliation or trauma.

The study identifies gaps in Pakistan's legal framework. Legisl-ation does not require child forensic interviews to be systematically conducted by specially trained professionals, increasing the risk of secondary victimisation during investigations.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 14TH, 2026

Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan to monitor Ponzi schemes



Securities and Exchange Commi-ssion of Pakistan. —Reuters/File

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has approved a Corporate Intelligence Unit (CIU) to identify registered companies suspected of running Ponzi or pyramid schemes, taking deposits or lending without a licence, or operating beyond their approved objectives.

The unit will monitor publicly available information, including news reports, social media and digital advertising, to identify potential violations before complaints are received. Verified leads will be referred to the relevant SECP departments for inquiry or enforcement action. Where appropriate, information may also be shared with agencies such as the FIA, NCCIA, State Bank of Pakistan and NAB.

The CIU is expected to strengthen the SECP's early-warning capacity, support timely regulatory intervention and help prevent further investor losses. By tracking recurring patterns and linking information from multiple public sources, it will also help the commission direct scrutiny towards emerging risks.

SECP Chairman Dr Kabir said that the CIU will strengthen the commission's risk-based surveillance by converting open-source information into verified regulatory leads.

The CIU is being established under Section 20 of the SECP Act 1997, as part of the Chairman's Secretariat.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 15TH, 2026

Strategy to end violence against children unveiled

IKRAM JUNAIDI



The silhouette of two children can be seen in this undated file image.—Reuters/File

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan launched its first national strategy, seeking to establish a coordinated system for preventing abuse, strengthening child protection and ensuring access to care and justice for millions of vulnerable children across the country.

The National Strategy to End Violence Against Children (2026-2031) was launched by Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights Saba Sadiq during a national preparatory consultation for the Second Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, scheduled to be held in Manila in November.

Developed by the Ministry of Human Rights in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the strategy comes against the backdrop of widespread violence and exploitation affecting children across the country.

According to the strategy, up to eight in 10 children in Pakistan experience violent discipline, while one in 16 internet-using children aged 12 to 17 faces technology-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse.

It also says 841,402 children aged 10 to 17 had been married, while millions remain engaged in child labour.

The strategy further highlights the vulnerability of children who are displaced, migrants or living in poor and informal urban settlements.

It seeks to address multiple forms of violence, including physical and sexual abuse, psychological violence, neglect, child marriage, trafficking, child labour and technology-facilitated exploitation.

The framework, based on the internationally recognised INSPIRE approach, focuses on stronger laws, safer environments, support for parents and caregivers, financial stability, response services and life skills.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 15TH, 2026

Persistence of force

TARIQ PARVEZ

WHILE the Balochistan insurgency has been simmering for many decades, in recent years, it seems to be spinning out of control.

In July this year, Balochistan became the country's most violent province, replacing KP for the first time. Some sources say there were 176 terrorist attacks, killing 438 people, including 127 security personnel, the highest ever in a month. This consistent increase in the insurgency's lethality and spread implies a major mismatch between the threat and the measures taken to counter it.

One major weakness is the imbalance between using armed force to address the challenge and subordinating the political dimension that sustains it. This begs the question: why do we continue to rely totally on the use of force to combat this insurgency, knowing that it has not worked for decades?

Historically, COIN (counter-insurgency) strategies have succeeded only when they struck the right balance between armed force and political measures. At best, force can create the right conditions to end an insurgency, but only politics can use that opening to bring about peace through negotiations. In fact, David Galula, in his book Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, argues that a successful COIN strategy is "80 per cent political and 20pc military". His "First Law of COIN" is that "the support of the population is as necessary for the counterinsurgent as the insurgent", and that this support can be achieved only through political measures. Similarly, Rupert Smith, in his book The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World, defines insurgency as "a war amongst people". He points out the strategic error of using armed force in an insurgency in a way that alienates the local population, reducing the utility of the force used. Thus, local support is crucial to maximising the utility of armed force in dealing with an insurgency and giving the counter-insurgents the upper hand.

Two broad narratives currently shape the Baloch insurgency. The first one, led by Baloch political leaders like Akhtar Mengal and Dr Abdul Malik Baloch (both heads of political parties and former chief ministers of Balochistan), emphasises that the insurgency in Balochistan is predominantly a political problem and requires a political approach for resolution. The second narrative — the military-led state view — which is being implemented in Balochistan is based on the premise that the Baloch insurgency is essentially sponsored by hostile foreign intelligence agencies, and local grievances are of secondary importance. At a workshop on Balochistan at GHQ last year, the military leadership pointed out that foreign-sponsored proxies continually sought to fuel violence and undermine stability in Balochistan. They would be met with a firm response by the military, it was said. This fundamental difference in the threat assessment of the Baloch insurgency between the establishment and the local political leadership leads to divergent responses.

The externalisation of the insurgency in Balochistan explains the state's predominant use of force. Framing the Baloch insurgency as being solely driven by Indian agencies makes it a part of the broader Pakistan-India hostility, and hence defines it as a security threat and not a political challenge. This narrative, naturally, supports a purely coercive response. Interestingly, as a response to the spike in violence in Balochistan in 2026, the state has responded by adding another command to FC Balochistan with no concomitant political initiatives.

Indeed, there is much weight in the establishment's assertion regarding external support to the Baloch insurgents, which is backed by solid evidence, such as the arrest of Indian agent Kulbhushan Jadhav. But to say that the insurgency is totally Indian-supported would be downplaying the significance of the local grievances, which sustain it. This makes our existing COIN strategy in Balochistan lopsided. Two factors strengthen the argument that the insurgency is grounded in local conditions.

One, the triggers of the first four waves of Baloch insurgency were local — in 1948 (annexation of Kalat), 1958 (setting up of One Unit, which erased Balochistan as a political entity, and the arrest of Khan of Kalat), 1962-69 (continued One Unit centralisation, new cantonments in Marri/ Bugti areas and Ayub Khan's repression), and 1973-77 (dismissal of the NAP government by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto). Second, the current insurgency wave has been going on for more than 20 years now, and to sustain it, a regular stream of local recruits, leadership, and support networks is needed. Such an elaborate network, working clandestinely, carrying out violent acts and hunted by the state, could not sustain itself without strong local support.

That is not to say the state did not try to tap the political dimension. But the endeavour was sporadic, half-hearted, lacked political ownership, and was abandoned too soon. For instance, in 2015, the political and military leadership decided to launch Pur Aman Balochistan — a three-dimensional initiative comprising talks with militants under the leadership of the then chief minister, Dr Malik, some development projects, and an amnesty for certain categories of militants. Dr Malik contacted different leaders, such as Brahmdagh Bugti, and brought back their response. The talks were given up when Dr Malik's tenure ended the same year. Other parts of this initiative also tapered off because the government showed little interest.

Thus, the persistence of the use of force in Balochistan is primarily due to the framing of this insurgency as a proxy war of hostile countries, and not as an expression of local discontent. This threat assessment does not seem to be working. Carl von Clausewitz in On War states: "The most far-reaching act of judgement that any commander has to make is to establish … the kind of war on which they are embarking." Because we cannot control it with our current strategy, we must review our assessment of the kind of "war amongst people" we are fighting in Balochistan. Is it an exclusively foreign proxy war or the violent response of radicalised, disgruntled elements of Balochistan, exploited by hostile external elements? Today's answer will determine whether we can resolve the situation or whether it will become a 'forever insurgency'.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 16TH, 2026

Rs615m recovered from illegal visa agents in Islamabad in four months: FIA

IFTIKHAR A. KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Islamabad Zone arrested 190 illegal visa agents and recovered Rs615.55m during the last four months in crackdowns on human smuggling and fraud.

According to data shared by FIA Islamabad Zone, the action was carried out under the supervision of the director, FIA Islamabad Zone, by the anti-human trafficking circles (AHTCs) Islamabad and Rawalpindi. During the four months, the two circles collectively registered 1,543 FIRs.

The breakdown shows AHTC Islamabad performed better, arresting 120 visa agents, recovering Rs411.05m and registering 875 cases. AHTC Rawalpindi arrested 70 agents, recovered Rs204.5m and registered 668 cases. In total, the zone recovered Rs615m, arrested 190 suspects and registered 1,543 cases.

The FIA said it was continuing steps to protect citizens from fraud in the name of overseas employment and travel, take legal action against illegal visa agents and prevent human smuggling. It advised citizens to verify agents before making any deal for overseas employment or travel and to immediately report any fraud or illegal activity to the authorities.

The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) Rawalpindi Circle on Friday claimed to have busted a cyber fraud network involved in fleecing foreign nationals.

The spokesperson for the NCCIA said the agency raided a private housing society and arrested three suspects, including a woman, involved in cyber financial fraud.

The suspects used to pose as bank representatives and officials of foreign law enforcement agencies to intimidate citizens, the spokesperson said. They used to extort money from victims through fear and deception, he added. Mobile phones were seized during the operation, and raids were underway to arrest other accomplices.

A case has been registered against the suspects under relevant provisions of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) and Pakistan Penal Code, and further investigation is underway. Director General NCCIA Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi said indiscriminate action against international cyber fraud networks tarnishing the country's image would continue.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 17TH, 2026

Working Together Matters: Pakistan Strengthens Inter-Agency Coordination to Combat Financial Crime



27 October 2026, Islamabad - Financial crimes rarely fall within the mandate of a single institution. Illicit funds can move across accounts, channels and jurisdictions, leaving different agencies with different pieces of the financial trail. Connecting these pieces is essential to detecting financial crime, investigating criminal networks, and pursuing effective prosecutions.

As financial crimes become increasingly complex and cut across institutional mandates, strengthening existing coordination mechanisms becomes even more important. Effective information-sharing, closer coordination and continued collaboration can help institutions connect the financial trail and act together more effectively.





Against this backdrop, the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Authority (National AML/CFT Authority), in collaboration UNODC, convened a national workshop in Islamabad to strengthen existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms for combating financial crime.

The workshop brought together 31 representatives from institutions operating across Pakistan's financial crime response. Rather than looking at the work of these institutions in isolation, discussions focused on a central question: how can agencies work together more effectively when a financial crime investigation crosses institutional boundaries?

Participants examined when and how agencies should coordinate during complex cases, the challenges of parallel and joint investigations, and gaps in existing inter-agency mechanisms.

Through group discussions, participating agencies identified operational, legal, and procedural challenges that can hinder information-sharing and joint action. The discussions were designed to culminate in tangible reform priorities and a way forward.





The workshop was held under the UNODC project "Strengthened and Improved Measures for Combating Financial Crime in Pakistan," funded by Global Affairs Canada. The project works to enhance Pakistan's capacity to detect, investigate and prosecute financial crime by strengthening institutional frameworks, improving inter-agency coordination and building the technical capacity of relevant agencies.



Source: https://www.unodc.org/copak

Govt raises threshold for currency transaction reports to Rs3m as anti-money laundering framework reviewed

KHALEEQ KIANI

ISLAMABAD: The government has enhanced the currency transaction threshold by 50pc to Rs3 million for banks to trigger suspicious reports to the Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) of the State Bank of Pakistan under the Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA).

The increase in threshold from Rs2m to Rs3m for Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs) under the framework for analysing Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) and CTRs was approved by the National Executive Committee (NEC) on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT).

An STR is reported when a suspicious transaction or activity involving money laundering and terrorism financing is indicated. However, a CTR is required to be reported when a cash transaction is equal to or exceeds the specified threshold — now raised to Rs3m.

The NEC, led by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, is responsible for setting limits for banks, financial institutions or other agencies dealing with financial transactions to generate CTRs and STRs on the amount of currency transactions through notifications in the official Gazette.

It serves as a strategic forum for strengthening Pakistan's AML-CFT framework and ensuring timely coordination, inter-agency cooperation and consistent monitoring for effective implementation of the measures discussed.

The committee also approved the inclusion of Section 28 of the Pakistan Maritime Zones Act 2023 in Schedule I of the AMLA, meaning that maritime piracy has been covered as a predicate offence.

Section 28 of the Maritime Zones Act 2023 defines "piracy" as any illegal act of violence, detention or depredation committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft and directed against another ship or aircraft or against persons or property onboard.

The NEC also approved the inclusion of the Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA) in Schedule IV of the AMLA, meaning that the crypto body would also have regulatory powers over virtual and digital assets to meet AML-CFT requirements, like the SBP, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and Federal Board of Revenue, among others.

Under the AMLA, the FMU is designated to receive STRs and CTRs from reporting entities, analyse them and, if need be, seek the entire record and information related to the transaction in question from any agency or individual in Pakistan.

All agencies and individuals are bound to promptly provide the requested record and information to enable the FMU to share its analysis on a confidential basis with the concerned investigating or prosecuting agencies, or with the financial intelligence units of other countries to make reciprocal arrangements to share, request and receive information relating to money laundering, the financing of terrorism and other offences.

An official statement said the meeting reviewed compliance with its past decisions and progress on Pakistan's AML-CFT regime, including the performance of the FMU, institutional capacity and initiatives involving artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Aurangzeb emphasised the importance of regular and timely follow-up and stronger coordination among the relevant institutions to ensure effective implementation of the national AML-CFT framework. He also called for strengthening the FMU's analytical and operational capacity through a clear implementation roadmap with defined timelines.

The NEC also highlighted the importance of keeping Pakistan's AML-CFT framework responsive to evolving financial risks and emerging technologies, while strengthening the analytical capabilities of relevant institutions.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 28, 2026

Reforms for REITs

ISLAMABAD: Regulated real estate investment trusts (REITs) could formalise the property sector and link it to capital markets, but speakers stressed that their growth depends on transparent valuations, strong governance, and simpler tax rules at an SECP Talk Series session.

SECP Commissioner Imtiaz Haider said REITs could mobilise private investment for infrastructure such as motorways, bridges, energy parks and logistics hubs. He also suggested exploring REITs to unlock value from existing public assets and finance development projects.

He cited 29 REIT schemes registered in Pakistan by March 2026, with an aggregate fund size of Rs173.1 billion. Globally, 1,021 listed REITs had a combined market capitalisation of $2.04 trillion at the end of 2024.

Zahid Latif Khan, Cha-ir-man of ISE REIT Ma--n-agement Company Ltd, highlighted the $2.04tr global REIT market and presented Rs5.67bn ISE Towers Rental REIT as a local example. He also outlined potential rental, developmental, hybrid and parking REIT opportunities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Speakers stressed that REIT returns and liquidity are not guaranteed; they depend on the und-erlying assets, scheme structure and market con-ditions. Independent valuation, trustee oversight, clear disclosures and investor awareness were identified as essential to building confidence.

Arif Habib Dolmen REIT Management Ltd CEO Muham-mad Ejaz pre--sented Dol-men City REIT and Globe Resid-e-ncy REIT as local examples. He cited Dol-men City REIT's market capitalisation at Rs86.88bn as of Sept 30, with occupancy above 97pc at both properties. He called for rationalising property transfer duties and taxes and reviewing investme-nt limits to support sector growth.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 28TH, 2026

Religious scholars reaffirm fatwa against suicide attacks, terrorism



ISLAMABAD: A joint meeting of religious scholars, spiritual leaders and representatives of different faiths, organised by the National Paigham-e-Aman Committee, and the Provincial Paigham-e-Aman Committee, Balochistan, was held at Jamia Salafia Dawat-ul-Haq under the chairmanship of Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council and Coordinator of the National Paigham-e-Aman Committee.

In a unanimous declaration, they reaffirmed the consensus fatwa against suicide attacks, terrorism, extremism and the killing of innocent people, while fully endorsing the national narrative of Paigham-e-Pakistan.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, OCTOBER 29, 2026

2,410 terrorists killed in last nine months



A pro-Saudi-backed Yemeni government fighter fires a vehicle-mounted weapon during what government forces say was an advance against the Iran-backed Houthis, near Dhubab, Taiz Governorate, Yemen, in this still image taken from video released October 5, 2026. PHOTO: REUTERS

ISLAMABAD: Security forces neutralised 2,410 terrorists during 5,143 intelligence-based operations in the first nine months of 2026, while the government continues to face challenges in curbing online extremism, the National Assembly was informed.

According to details presented by the Interior Ministry, the operations also left 806 terrorists injured and resulted in the arrest of 3,518 others. The figures were shared alongside details of measures taken under the National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism and extremist content online.

The ministry said the NAP was launched in 2014 and reviewed in 2021. The revised framework comprises 14 points and 245 key measures and serves as the country's primary counterterrorism strategy. However, it acknowledged that efforts to curb extremist material online had not received adequate attention.

The legal framework for tackling online extremism includes the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), under which the Social Media Protection and Regulatory Authority has

been established. Action has also been initiated against individuals involved in spreading anti-state propaganda, the ministry told the house.

Social media platforms, however, have shown varying levels of compliance with requests to remove objectionable content. According to the ministry, the companies complied with 23.7% of requests made by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and 47% of those submitted by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD).

Platform-wise figures showed that X removed 7.4% of content in response to requests from state institutions, while YouTube removed 1.9% and Facebook 38%. The ministry said social media companies had yet to adopt government rules, leaving gaps in the regulatory framework.

Punjab accounted for 97.7% of requests concerning online extremist content, with the provincial CTD submitting the overwhelming majority. In Sindh and Balochistan, the compliance rate remained zero despite requests from the relevant authorities, according to the ministry.

The ministry also disclosed that the National Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta) had sought more than Rs2.98 billion for the current fiscal year, but the government allocated Rs1.3326 billion. The government is considering upgrading Nacta to the status of a division to strengthen coordination among counterterrorism institutions nationwide.

In a separate disclosure, the Interior Ministry informed the National Assembly that more than 326,000 computerised national identity cards (CNICs) had been cancelled over the past five years, with 255,139 cancellations recorded in 2026 alone.

The ministry said 624 CNICs were cancelled in 2025, around 8,500 in 2024, 117 in 2023 and 62 in 2022. It attributed the cancellations to cases involving Afghan nationals who had obtained Pakistani identity cards through fraud and forgery, adding that the cards were cancelled after the cases were identified.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, OCTOBER 29, 2026

Afghanistan opium poppy cultivation surges despite Taliban govt ban: UN



Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan more than quadrupled in 2026 despite a Taliban government ban, the United Nations said on Thursday, urging that impoverished farmers needed alternatives to the lucrative crop.

Cultivated areas reached 43,000 hectares (around 106,200 acres), up from 10,000 hectares in 2025, while estimated opium production jumped fivefold from 300 tonnes to 1,500 tonnes, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in a report.

Long the world's leading producer of poppies, Afghanistan was overtaken by Myanmar after a 2022 Taliban government ban crushed the trade in the country.

But rampant poverty has driven some farmers to return to the trade.

"Without opium, we cannot even afford basic food," Mohammad, a 22-year-old farmer in Afghanistan's northeast, told AFP.

Afghanistan's 2022 crackdown drove cultivated areas down from more than 200,000 hectares to 10,000 hectares in 2025. Myanmar cultivated 53,000 hectares in 2025, with no 2026 figures available.

The Taliban authorities claim to have destroyed more than 22,000 hectares. But UNODC said many poppy plots were concealed among cereal crops or behind walls, making them difficult to detect.



Mohammad lives with his parents in Badakhshan, which has become Afghanistan's main opium poppy-growing province.

"The Taliban threaten us and do not allow us to grow opium. We cultivate it with a great deal of fear," he said, asking only to be identified by his first name.

"I want to buy a car, build a house and get married. Without opium, I cannot achieve these things," he further explained.

'The only way'

In May, two people were killed in clashes that erupted as Afghan security forces moved to destroy opium poppy fields in Badakhshan. Another 35-year-old farmer named Mohammad, who ploughs his poppy field with an ox, said: "If we grow wheat, it is not enough to sustain our lives. We are forced to grow poppies to earn a good income."

Mohammad said that he is threatened by the authorities and sometimes his crops are destroyed, but he will continue. "It is the only way to cover living expenses," he said. One hectare of wheat generated just over $770 in 2023, compared with $10,000 for a hectare of poppy, according to UNODC.

"Opium prices slightly decreased from $570 per kilogramme in 2025 to $500 per kilogramme in 2026, remaining well above pre-ban levels of less than $100 per kilogramme," UNODC said in a press release.

"The fourfold increase in opium poppy cultivation shows the difficulty in sustaining decreases in illicit opium cultivation when poor farmers have no alternatives to feed their families," said UNODC Executive Director Monica Juma.

The Taliban government acknowledged that the ban was not a "sustainable and long-term solution" without alternative livelihoods and economic support for farmers.

The challenge comes as Afghanistan faces the return of 6.6m Afghans since 2023, climate disasters, dwindling aid and banking isolation since the Taliban movement returned to power in 2021. With support from Japan and the European Union, UNODC has funded programmes to help farmers find alternatives.

'International problem'

Through the NGO Afghan Aid, Zikrullah, 35, who supports an extended family of 12 in Badakhshan, received improved wheat seeds and fertiliser.

"We're satisfied, it takes less effort than opium and we're more at ease," he told AFP, also asking to be identified only by his first name. A third farmer named Mohammad, 30, who has converted 80 per cent of his land to wheat, told AFP that the lack of water in recent years has affected crops other than poppy.

To curb opium production sustainably, alternative crops alone are insufficient, UNODC Country Representative for Afghanistan Polleak Ok Serei told AFP in an interview in Kabul.

"Sustainable alternative livelihood requires more than thinking in terms of alternative crops," he said. Farmers "need access to markets, including international markets through trades. They need infrastructure, roads, irrigation, storage".

UNODC estimated in 2025 that approach would require approximately $500m, but "only 10pc" had been funded by donors and the Taliban authorities, according to Ok Serei.

The strategy also takes time, he said.

"Thailand spent 15 years investing in alternative livelihood before starting eradicating," Ok Serei said.

The problem extends far beyond Afghanistan, he said. "It truly is an international problem," Ok Serei added, explaining that Afghan drugs were consumed across other continents. Afghan opium is the main source of heroin in the European Union, where approximately 850,000 people used opioids in 2024, according to the European Union Drugs Agency.

Addressing the problem requires international cooperation, the UN representative said. Ok Serei called for a "drug demand reduction strategy, not only in Afghanistan but also outside of Afghanistan".

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 29, 2026

Crypto exchange Binance freezes assets after $6.3 billion security breach



A representation of the cryptocurrency is seen in front of Binance logo in this illustration. — Reuters/File

Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, said a security breach had resulted in an estimated $6.3 billion impact that analysts said could amount to the biggest crypto heist ever and might make investors rethink the risks of owning digital assets.

Binance said it had worked with partners to freeze the affected assets, with about $3 billion located so far. It gave no update on the status of the remaining $3.3 billion as Binance co-founder Yi He said the company would cover "all hacking losses".

An initial investigation suggested the breach may have started with a hacked laptop belonging to one of its engineers, which let an attacker gain access to one of its systems and make unauthorised withdrawals, Binance said.

Markets reacted immediately in early Asian trading on Friday.

Bitcoin dropped more than 3 per cent to a six-week low of $76,368 and ether fell more than 3pc to a two-month low of $2,178. BNB, a token originally launched as Binance Coin that can be used to pay Binance fees, was down 5pc over the past 24 hours at $709.70, according to market aggregator CoinGecko.

Shares in crypto exchange Coinbase Global slid 4.8pc while those of bitcoin buyer Strategy fell nearly 6pc in extended US trading.

The incident could be the world's biggest crypto heist, according to analytics firm Chainalysis and other industry experts.

"It's the biggest hack in history," said Aravind Srinivasan, head of large crypto market maker GSR's systematic OTC business.

Beyond the potential loss of assets, the security breach was likely to have wider ramifications for crypto, which had already been under pressure lately due to higher US interest rates and softer demand from exchange-traded fund buyers, analysts said.

"It may further dampen risk appetite and prompt investors to reassess the safety of assets held on centralised exchanges, as well as counterparty, solvency and liquidity risks," said Tim Sun, senior researcher at HashKey Group, based in Hong Kong.

Binance, which allows users to buy, sell and trade digital assets, has 335 million registered users globally and had about $162.8 billion in assets under custody as of the exchange's 2025 annual report.

"User funds remain safe," Binance said in a statement.

"As a precaution, all deposits and withdrawals are temporarily suspended while our security teams conduct checks, secure wallet infrastructure, and trace affected assets, with the close support of our law enforcement and industry partners."

Binance has secure asset fund

Binance runs a secure asset fund for users, which is a reserve held entirely in bitcoin that is intended to protect user assets in cases of security breaches, according to its website.

"It's becoming very hard to counter hacks as AI can find vulnerabilities faster than you can fix them," said Bernardo Brites, CEO of Trace Finance, a payments and stablecoin infrastructure company.

"My view is that users will move away from smaller and medium-sized exchanges, (it is) becoming too risky to park your money somewhere that couldn't cover a hack of meaningful size."

Stablecoin issuer Tether said it had frozen nearly $1.57 billion in assets linked to the incident, while Circle froze more than $800 million.

World Liberty Financial, a crypto company linked to US President Donald Trump and his family, said on Thursday it had worked with cryptocurrency custodian BitGo to freeze funds stolen in what it described as a Binance hack. Binance's Yi said $27 million in stablecoins and about $2 million worth of World Liberty tokens had been frozen.

Crypto firm Ripple also froze roughly $200 million in funds, Yi said. Jack McDonald, senior vice president of stablecoins at Ripple, said the company was closely monitoring reports of a potential exploit involving Binance and was freezing affected funds and coordinating with relevant parties.

Incident adds to string of crypto thefts

Miguel Morel, CEO of blockchain intelligence firm Arkham, said data indicated that billions of dollars appeared to have been hacked from Binance by an unknown actor.

The incident adds to a string of crypto thefts. Last year, attackers stole $2.9 billion worth of cryptocurrency across nearly 150 attacks, according to researchers at TRM Labs. In September, cryptocurrency exchange Bitget said roughly $350 million in crypto had been stolen from its platform, underscoring the industry's vulnerability to hackers.

Authorities have warned that organised crime groups are increasingly using cryptocurrencies to move funds across borders outside the traditional financial system.

Binance.US, a separate cryptocurrency exchange, said it was not affected by the security incident.

Coinbase said it was unaffected and was monitoring the situation.

In an unrelated incident earlier on Thursday, prediction market operator Polymarket temporarily halted trading after a security incident involving a third-party provider. It later resumed trading and said it would fully reimburse affected traders.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 30, 2026

Excessive punishment

THE supposed 'crime' did not justify a trial under terrorism laws, and certainly not the punishment. On Thursday, human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir and her husband and fellow lawyer, Hadi Ali Chattha, were sentenced to 10 years each for moving a security barrier reportedly placed to protect a touring cricket team, as well as for "incitement to public unrest" during a face-off with police.

The trial, held in jail, drew persistent criticism over an alleged lack of due process. The judge held that Ms Mazari-Hazir and Mr Chattha had attempted to "compromise the security arrangements [made for the team] through pressuring security officials".

The judgement cited the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore — an assault that had been perpetrated by more than a dozen terrorists armed with heavy weapons — to reason that the lawyers' act of removing the barrier and 'assaulting' police personnel "put the security of an international team visiting Pakistan at risk [and] clearly shows the intentions and objective of the accused to create sense of terror [sic]".

Just last month, after a lengthy appeals process, the Supreme Court ordered the suspension of the sentence handed to the two lawyers in the so-called social media posts case and ordered their release pending the Islamabad High Court's decision on their appeal against the trial court's verdict.

However, they were promptly rearrested in connection with this case, and have now been handed a lengthy sentence that will keep them behind bars while they appeal. Ms Mazari-Hazir is one of the most prominent champions of civil and human rights from the legal community, and has often taken cases involving some of Pakistan's most vulnerable citizens pro bono.

She is also an outspoken critic of government and state excesses. It is unfortunate to see her and her husband punished so harshly for acts that seem downright frivolous compared to the violence actual terrorists routinely perpetrate.

The higher courts must hear their appeal swiftly, and the state must stop stretching antiterrorism laws to cover acts that bear no resemblance to terrorism. Such verdicts send a chilling message to every lawyer willing to defend the vulnerable. The law need only appear to serve narrow interests, rather than justice, for public faith in it to be shaken.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 31ST, 2026

KP police get tech to monitor counterterrorism operations

UMER FAROOQ

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police have integrated anti-drone systems and surveillance drones operating across the province into the Safe City Peshawar's Command and Control Centre to strengthen security and surveillance capabilities.

With the integration of Safe City cameras and anti-drone systems, live video and surveillance feeds from police drones operating anywhere in the province, including during field operations and offensives carried out against terrorists by the police and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), can now be monitored at the Command and Control Centre.

Under the new system, hostile quadcopters and drones will not only be detected promptly but also neutralised, KP Safe Cities Project Director Deputy Inspector General Ijaz Ahmad said.

Addressing a news conference at the Command and Control Centre, DIG Ahmad said anti-drone systems installed in Peshawar and other cities had been linked to the centre.

He said live monitoring of police operations, including those conducted by the CTD across the province, had also become possible, facilitating the timely sharing of information.

The DIG said modern anti-drone systems had already been deployed in Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, Tank and Bannu districts to meet evolving security requirements and counter emerging warfare threats. Anti-drone guns had also been provided to police personnel in remote and sensitive areas of the province, he added.

He said the objective was to enhance the police's ability to promptly detect and neutralise potential threats posed by hostile quadcopters and drones.

The DIG said monitoring and control of police surveillance drones across the province had also been incorporated into the central system.

"Now, during a police operation in any area, live video footage captured by drones will be transmitted to the central Command and Control Centre. This will keep senior police officers directly informed about the ground situation and help them support field operations effectively," he said.

However, he said the lack of internet connectivity in some areas remained a challenge. Steps were being taken in collaboration with the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) to address the issue, he added.

He said the integrated use of modern technology, drone surveillance, anti-drone systems and centralised monitoring would further strengthen the police's operational capabilities, security surveillance and response to militant threats.

Making the policing system more effective, coordinated and modern through technology was the need of the hour, he said, adding that the Safe Cities project was providing technical support to the KP police in this regard.

Meanwhile, the KP police have established a specialised human resource division trained in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) combat to wage high-tech warfare against terrorists, whose use of drones is evolving from surveillance and ammunition drops to swarm attacks.

The UAV division, initially conceived as an idea, was established in response to advances in terrorists' capabilities and their growing shift from conventional street fighting to aerial warfare.

The personnel have been trained in modern drone operation, aerial surveillance, intelligence gathering, counterterrorism, protection of sensitive installations and the use of UAV technology in high-risk operations.

The division is the first of its kind established by a police department in the country.

An official said the KP police had realised that technology alone was insufficient and had taken the crucial step of establishing a specialised division of personnel trained in UAV operations.

"These personnel are not only trained to operate drones for surveillance but are also capable of conducting electronic warfare against hostile UAVs," he added.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 31ST, 2026

Terrorist attacks drop by 37pc in October: PICSS



A Pakistan Frontier Corps machine gunner stands guard in a pillbox in Balochistan. — AFP/File

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan witnessed a significant improvement in several key security indicators during October, with terrorist attacks declining by 37 per cent compared with September.

According to statistics released by the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), the country experienced 143 terrorist attacks during October, compared with 226 in September. The decline reversed two consecutive months of increasing terrorist violence.

The improvement was particularly pronounced in Balochistan and mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while suicide attacks also declined substantially. However, an increase in kidnappings, particularly in Balochistan, remained a major area of concern.

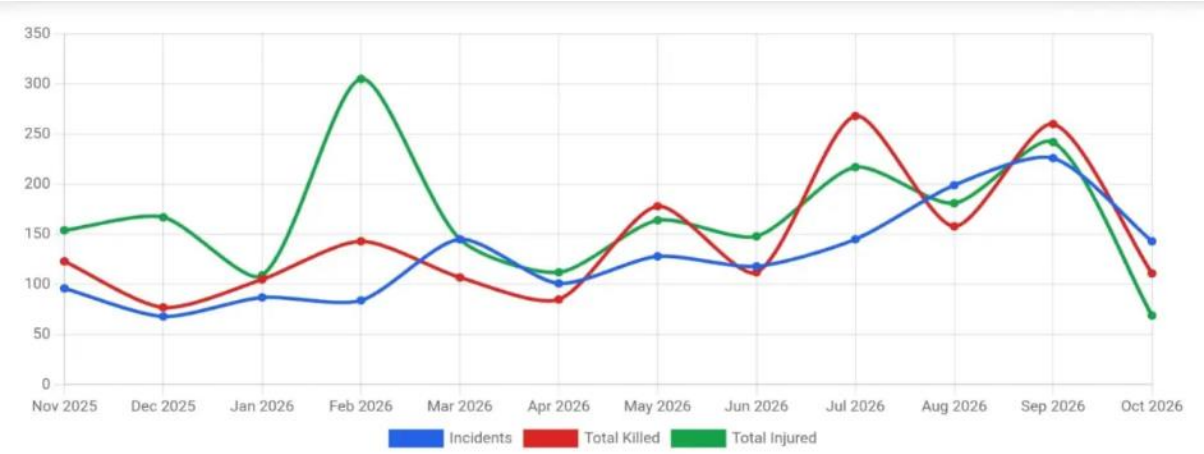
Data gathered by PICSS showed that terrorist attacks claimed 111 lives in October, compared with 260 in September, representing a reduction of 57pc. The number of people injured in these attacks dropped even more sharply, from 242 to just 69, a decline of 71pc.

The improvement in the security situation was also reflected in the overall human cost of violence.

According to PICSS, terrorist attacks and security forces' counterterrorism operations collectively resulted in deaths of 53 security forces personnel, 45 civilians and five peace committee members, while 169 terrorists were killed.

The 71 injured included 29 security forces personnel, 11 peace committee members, and 31 civilians.

A rolling 12-month comparison conducted by PICSS revealed several encouraging developments. Injuries resulting from terrorist attacks fell to their lowest monthly level in the past year. The combined number of injuries from terrorist attacks and security operations also reached a 12-month low, as did injuries among security forces personnel.



Screengrab via PICSS report.

The number of suicide attacks was jointly the lowest recorded during the same period. However, the number of terrorists killed, at 169, was also the lowest monthly figure in the past 12 months, reflecting a decline in terrorist fatalities, the report noted.

Suicide attacks declined sharply during October, with only one such incident, compared with three in September. The October incident involved a vehicle-borne suicide attack but caused no fatalities or injuries.

In contrast, the three suicide attacks recorded in September, including two vehicle-borne attacks, resulted in 45 deaths and 138 injuries. Consequently, fatalities and injuries from suicide attacks both declined by 100pc during October.

According to PICSS, continued counterterrorism operations across the country by security forces resulted in the killing of 156 terrorists and the arrest of seven suspected terrorists during October. Two security forces personnel and three civilians lost their lives during these operations, while two security forces personnel were injured.

Balochistan

Balochistan recorded one of the most significant improvements, with terrorist attacks declining by 46pc, from 132 in September to 71 in October. Fatalities from terrorist attacks

dropped from 136 to 44, representing a reduction of approximately 68pc, while injuries declined from 63 to 37, a decrease of 41pc.

Separately, security forces' operations in the province resulted in the killing of 79 terrorists.

Three civilians lost their lives, and two security forces personnel were injured during these operations.

In October, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) had confirmed that an army major was martyred in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Balochistan.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

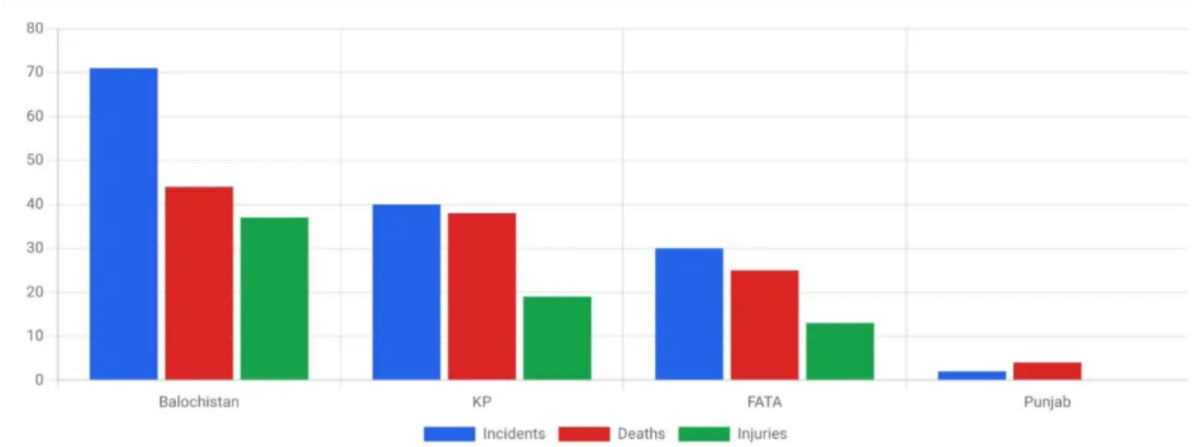
Mainland KP, excluding the formerly federally administered tribal areas, also witnessed a substantial improvement. PICSS reported 40 terrorist attacks in October, compared with 58 in September, representing a decline of 31pc. Fatalities from these attacks decreased from 90 to 38, a reduction of approximately 58pc, while injuries fell from 165 to 19, an improvement of 88pc.

Counterterrorism operations in the region resulted in the killing of 42 terrorists, while two security forces personnel lost their lives.

The erstwhile FATA region experienced a comparatively modest decline in terrorist violence, the report said. The think tank recorded 30 attacks during October, compared with 34 in September, a reduction of 12pc. Deaths resulting from terrorist attacks declined from 33 to 25, while injuries increased slightly from 11 to 13. Security forces' operations in these districts resulted in the killing of 35 terrorists.

Sindh and Punjab

Punjab witnessed two terrorist attacks during October, compared with none in September. These incidents resulted in four deaths and no injuries.



Screengrab via PICSS report.

Sindh recorded no terrorist attacks during the month. However, counterterrorism operations in the province resulted in the arrest of seven suspected terrorists. Islamabad, Azad Jammu

and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan also remained free of recorded terrorist attacks during October.

Kidnappings 'serious security concern'

Despite the overall improvement, kidnappings emerged as a serious security concern, particularly in Balochistan.

PICSS recorded 88 people kidnapped in terrorist incidents nationwide during October, compared with 72 in September, an increase of 22pc. This was the highest monthly kidnapping figure recorded during the preceding 12 months. Balochistan accounted for 70 of these kidnappings, representing nearly 80pc of the nationwide total.

The increase suggests that, despite the reduction in attacks and casualties, kidnapping remained a significant tactic employed by terrorist groups, the report said.

While October's figures indicate a significant month-on-month improvement, the longer-term security picture remains challenging.

According to the report, Pakistan experienced 1,376 terrorist attacks during the first 10 months of 2026. These attacks, alongside security forces' counterterrorism operations, collectively resulted in 3,902 deaths, including 645 security forces personnel, 65 peace committee members, 595 civilians, and 2,597 terrorists.

Another 1,953 people were injured during the January–October period, including 639 security forces personnel, 62 peace committee members, 1,055 civilians, and 197 terrorists.

Compared with the corresponding 10-month period of 2025, the number of terrorist attacks increased by 53pc, while the combined death toll rose by 36pc.

Despite the monthly decline in terrorist attacks, violence-linked fatalities rose sharply by 83pc in the third quarter of 2026, according to a recent report from the Centre for Research and Security Studies, re--versing a declining trend reported in the first and second quarters as terrorism and counterterrorism deaths surged nationwide.

SOURCE: DAWN, NOVEMBER 01, 2026

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