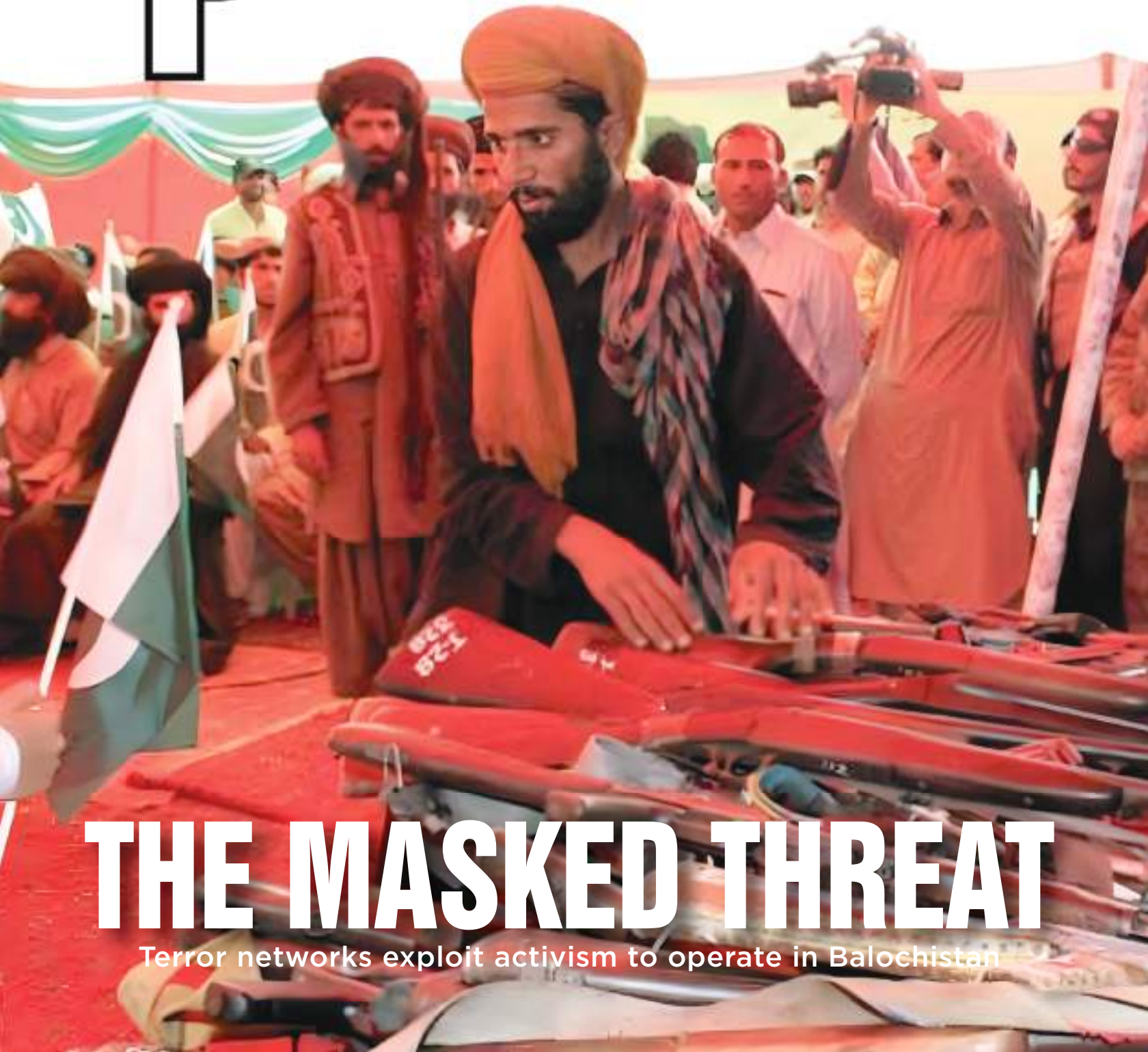


SEPTEMBER 2025 VOLUME VII - ISSUE VII

Tracking the Disappeared | The Saudi Pact and Beyond | Why Our Youth Are Adrift

BALUCHISTAN PULSE



THE MASKED THREAT

Terror networks exploit activism to operate in Balochistan

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By: Dr. Abdul Rehman Khan



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As Pakistan tackles regional and internal challenges, Balochistan remains central to its vision for security and development. This edition of Balochistan Pulse highlights the state's firm resolve to eliminate terrorism, improve governance and promote inclusive growth across the province. From effective counterterrorism efforts to renewed partnerships like the defence pact with Riyadh, Islamabad continues to pursue peace through strength, strategy and cooperation. In exclusive conversations with Senator Kamran Murtaza, Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal and veteran diplomat Sardar Masood Khan, we explore how unity, economic revival and diplomacy are guiding the nation forward.

Beyond security, this issue celebrates Balochistan's resilience, from the music of Urooj Fatima and the art of Jamal Shah to efforts in education, healthcare and environmental renewal. Progress on the missing persons issue and new opportunities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project reflect a province moving with confidence toward a peaceful and prosperous future.

Every challenge brings a chance to move forward. Balochistan's progress reflects Pakistan's shared goal of peace, growth and hope.



Editor
Balochistan Pulse

Mirwaise Khan Achakzai

THE SHADOW NETWORK

Surrendered Baloch terrorists expose how activism in Balochistan has been used as a facade for violence. From the Baloch Yakjehti Committee's role to international lobbying for Nobel recognition, this feature unpacks the complex web of ideology, influence and disinformation shaping the province's conflict.

By Fazal Baloch



Mahrang Baloch (first row) with BLA supporter Kiyya Baloch (second row) and Nobel Committee member Jorgen Watne Frydnes (last row) at a PEN Norway event in May 2024, raising questions about her peace prize nomination.

In a recent televised interview, a former Baloch National Army (BNA) commander, Sarfraz Bangulzai, made a series of startling revelations that have reignited debate over the blurred lines between activism, terrorism, and foreign influence in violence in Balochistan. Speaking to Geo News, Bangulzai described how banned terrorist groups — the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) — have operated in tandem with the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), which he termed a “political and social façade” for violence. According to him, BYC mobilises young people under the banner of activism, while some of its networks serve as a recruitment and propaganda arm for terrorists operating from across the border.

A Network with Many Names

Bangulzai’s claims focus on the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) — a movement that emerged in the name of unity and justice but, according to him, provided political and social cover to banned groups operating under different names. Bangulzai explained that the BLA, BLF, and BYC operate less as separate groups and more as a coordinated structure, where one provides ideological legitimacy while others carry out armed operations. “The faces change, the names change, but the purpose remains the same. The real tragedy is that educated youth are being manipulated in the name of rights and identity.”

The BLA, BLF, and BYC function as interconnected entities forming a single network, Bangulzai said. “The BYC provides the narrative and legitimacy needed to attract educated youth while banned groups handle the logistics of violence.” He also revealed that digital platforms sympathetic to the terrorist cause have been instrumental in shaping public opinion, spreading disinformation, and recruiting young people through emotional narratives of resistance and sacrifice. “These movements exploit the sentiments of youth while their leaders live comfortably abroad.” According to him, the strategy relies heavily on emotional appeal. Students and young activists are encouraged to see themselves as defenders of the homeland — a sentiment that soon turns into recruitment and radicalization. “They tell you that you’re fighting for your people, but you end up destroying the very land you love.” He urged Baloch youth to learn from his own mistakes and to channel their energies toward education, dialogue, and community development instead of confrontation.

Two Commanders, One Story

Bangulzai’s testimony echoes that of another surrendered commander, Gulzar Imam — also known as Shambay — who was arrested in a major intelligence operation in May 2023. Imam, formerly head of the Baloch National Army, later confirmed the existence of a close nexus between the BLA, BLF, and BYC. He described how student organizations and social platforms are used as “recruitment nurseries,” gradually radicalizing youth through ideological indoctrination and anti-state propaganda.



Former BNM commander Sarfraz Bangulzai before his surrender to the state.



Mahrang Baloch at her father's grave with a flag of the banned terrorist outfit BLA.

Mahrang Baloch's Family Link

Both commanders also spoke about the family background of Dr. Mahrang Baloch, the head of BYC. They stated that her father, Ghaffar Langove, was a BLA commander killed during internal factional fighting. “Langove’s grave is wrapped in the BLA flag,” Imam said, referencing a BBC documentary that filmed it. “The organisation itself still claims him as one of its own.” These disclosures have intensified scrutiny of the ideological continuity between the BLA and BYC. Bangulzai said that BYC carries forward the same narrative, though in the language of human rights and student activism.



They tell you that you’re fighting for your people — but you end up destroying the very land you love.

Two Arrests That Shifted the Narrative

Bangulzai’s statements follow two major turning points in the security landscape: In May 2023, Imam Gulzar Shambay, another senior commander, was captured in a targeted operation. His interrogation reportedly exposed how digital propaganda and terrorist strategy now overlap. Later that year, Bangulzai surrendered along with over seventy associates, renouncing violence and committing to rehabilitation.

Digital Fronts and Information Battles

Both Gulzar and Bangulzai emphasized that the battleground is no longer limited to mountains or hideouts — it now extends to social media and information platforms. According to them, digital outlets and social media pages operating in the name of Baloch rights have become powerful tools for spreading one-sided narratives, glorifying terrorism and discrediting any move toward reconciliation.



Baloch youth after renouncing terrorism.

They said these campaigns often emerge from outside Balochistan, targeting youth through emotional storytelling and selective imagery.

The Nobel Controversy

The debate over activism and terrorism also reached global attention when reports surfaced about Dr. Mahrang Baloch's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The nomination, reportedly supported by individual sympathetic to banned groups, triggered questions about how international recognition can sometimes intersect with local conflicts and complex allegiances.

In May 2024, Mahrang Baloch met with Jørgen Watne Frydnes, a member of the Norwegian Nobel Committee. This meeting was facilitated by Kiyya Baloch, a close associate and supporter of banned terrorist organizations operating in Balochistan.

It was through Kiyya Baloch's efforts that this meeting was arranged, and following her lobbying, Frydnes is understood to have supported Mahrang Baloch's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Both Kiyya Baloch and Jørgen Watne Frydnes are affiliated with PEN Norway, a Norwegian non-governmental and nonprofit organization. Frydnes

has served as General Secretary of PEN Norway since 2023, and Kiyya Baloch works under his leadership in the role of Communications Officer. It was through this organizational connection that Mahrang Baloch's invitation to Norway was facilitated, leading directly to her engagement with Frydnes.

Serious concerns arise from Kiyya Baloch's well-documented support for the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and its alias, the Majeed Brigade, which was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) by the United States in August 2025. Kiyya Baloch has openly glorified violent attacks carried out by the BLA against civilians and civilian infrastructure — positions that stand in direct

contradiction to the values represented by the Nobel Peace Prize.

The fact that a known sympathiser of a banned terrorist organisation is actively lobbying for a Nobel Peace Prize nomination, while working under a current member of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, raises grave concerns about the credibility and integrity of the nomination process in this case.

Foreign Support and Networks

Both Gulzar and Bangulzai have consistently pointed to foreign financial and logistical support for Baloch

terrorist groups. They claim India's RAW coordinates funding pipelines and digital propaganda from European cities and Afghan border regions, where anti-Pakistan campaigns are run under the pretext of human rights advocacy.

Gulzar added that student organisations and social platforms often serve as "recruitment nurseries," luring educated youth into extremist networks with slogans of identity and resistance.

Managing Borders, Reclaiming Peace

Bangulzai called for tighter border management with Afghanistan and Iran, similar to Pakistan's arrangements with China and India. He stressed that joint surveillance, local cooperation, and curbing illegal trade routes are key to stopping cross-border arms and terrorist movement.

He also appealed to the government and civil society to expand rehabilitation programs for surrendered terrorists, saying that reintegration and awareness can "save another generation from being used."

Echoes of EU DisinfoLab

In 2020, the EU DisinfoLab exposed a vast network of Indian-linked fake media outlets operating across 65 countries to push anti-Pakistan propaganda. The new evidence shared by Bangulzai and Imam suggests that the same ecosystem has evolved, using Baloch rights activism as its modern façade. This hybrid strategy — terrorism on the ground, disinformation online, and lobbying abroad — mirrors the same formula once used in the Srivastava Group's campaign, now reappearing through digital fronts connected to the BLA and BYC.

The Disinformation Network

Digital operations against Pakistan have intensified under the names of Baloch rights movements, involving figures like Mir Yar Baloch, Dr. Naseem Baloch, and groups such as BNM, Paank, and Hakpaan.

Each presents itself as a rights organisation, but their messaging and affiliations trace back to Hyrbyair Marri, the exiled leader of the banned BLA.

These groups, operating largely from Europe, run well-funded digital campaigns and participate in international events — often under the banners of human rights and

self-determination, but with messaging that mirrors terrorist rhetoric.

Groups like Paank (France) and Hakpaan (Sweden) claim to work for human rights but often publish anti-Pakistan narratives aligned with BLA sympathisers. Their campaigns receive consistent amplification through ANI, the Indian state-linked news agency previously exposed by EU DisinfoLab.

This growing presence in European media spaces raises concerns about how terror-linked narratives continue to rebrand

themselves as "advocacy."

Unequal Rules of the Digital World

While major platforms swiftly remove ISIS or Al-Qaeda propaganda, BLA-linked content remains unchecked, revealing a double standard in global content regulation. This inconsistency allows disinformation networks to flourish, shaping international perception against Pakistan while shielding the terrorist origins of their messaging.



The BYC provides the narrative and legitimacy; the terrorists provide the fire.



Former terrorist leaders Sarfraz Bangulzai and Imam Gulzar Shambey together before surrender.

TERROR VS COUNTERTERRORISM

In August–September 2025, terrorist attacks and security operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan left dozens dead, including terrorists, civilians and security personnel.

AUGUST

Zhob (Balochistan)	Large-scale anti-infiltration operation along Pak–Afghan border (Sambaza area)	47 terrorists killed; arms and explosives recovered	Aug 7–9
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Zhob (Balochistan)	Continued sanitisation ops	3 terrorists killed	Aug 10–11
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Quetta (Balochistan)	Foiled suicide attack on Independence Day	1 suicide bomber arrested; 2 facilitators later detained	Aug 14
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Upper & Lower Dir (KP)	Multiple terrorist attacks on police checkpoints	5 policemen martyred; 7 terrorists killed; 3 civilians killed	Aug 26–27
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SEPTEMBER

Quetta (Balochistan)	Suicide blast at BNP (Mengal) rally	15 killed, 38 injured	Sep 2–3
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Mohmand, Waziristan, Bannu (KP) + Pishin (Balochistan)	Coordinated IBOs	14 terrorists killed in Mohmand, 4 in North Waziristan 1 in Bannu; 4 terrorists killed in Pishin	Sep 9–10
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Lakki Marwat and Bannu (KP)	Back-to-back IBOs targeting terrorists	31 terrorists killed (14 in Lakki Marwat, 17 in Bannu)	Sep 13–14
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Sherani (Balochistan)	Armed attack on police/Levies post	2 personnel martyred, 2 injured	Sep 17
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Bannu (KP)	Foiled attack by terrorists	3 terrorists killed, 4 injured; several policemen wounded	
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Khuzdar (Balochistan)	Operation targeting terrorists	5 terrorists killed; arms seized	
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Chaman (Balochistan)	Bomb blast near taxi stand	5 killed, 3 injured	Sep 18
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Kulachi (KP)	IBO against terrorists	7 killed (including 3 Afghans, 2 suicide bombers)	Sep 20
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TRACKING THE DISAPPEARED

Official data shows steady improvement in resolving enforced disappearance cases despite propaganda

By Ali Dost



The debate over enforced disappearances in Pakistan has long been clouded by emotion, politics and propaganda. Yet the latest figures from the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (CoIED) tell a story of steady progress. Established by the federal government in 2011, the commission has now disposed of nearly 85 percent of all cases brought before it, with hundreds resolved in recent months alone.

Marked Headway

According to its latest report, 113 cases were closed in September 2025, including 14 individuals who safely

returned home. Since its inception, the commission has received 10,636 complaints, of which 8,986 have been resolved. Just 1,650 remain under active investigation. Over the past three months, July to September, 289 cases were closed, an average of almost 100 per month. Alongside case resolution, the commission has introduced welfare measures for families. These include help with official paperwork, such as Form B for children, and pension entitlements for relatives of missing government servants. Officials argue that these steps show a growing recognition of the human cost borne by families left behind.

Yet for all this progress, controversy remains. Some activists and pressure groups insist that the true scale

of enforced disappearances in Pakistan is far higher, with figures of 18,000 or more often cited. However, officials say such claims are part of a propaganda narrative that inflates the crisis without evidence. Independent reviews have uncovered inconsistencies in these lists, which sometimes include deceased individuals, members of banned separatist groups, or people who voluntarily migrated abroad. In several instances, men labelled as “missing” were later found to be active members of terrorist outfits such as the Balochistan Liberation Army and Baloch Republican Army, living in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

Beyond Borders

The government argues that painting Pakistan as a country in the grip of an “enforced disappearances epidemic” is misleading when compared with global data. Missing persons are a worldwide phenomenon. The United States, for example, has over 520,000 reported cases. India records more than 347,000 (excluding thousands in occupied Jammu and Kashmir), the United Kingdom 247,000, Sri Lanka more than 21,000, and Germany around 11,000. Against these numbers, Pakistan’s 2,256 unresolved cases appear comparatively limited. Officials insist the figures show that Pakistan is not an outlier but a country tackling an issue faced in many parts of the world.

Concrete steps have also been taken at the national level. The creation of the CoIED in 2011 provided a dedicated body to investigate cases. In 2019, parliament criminalised enforced disappearances, making it a punishable offence under law. Pakistan has also worked closely with international bodies. Collaboration with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has yielded results: out of 1,489 cases referred to Pakistan, 1,125 have been resolved at the rate of 75 percent, significantly higher

Since its inception in 2011, the CoIED has received

10,636 Complaints

8,986 Resolved

1,650 Under active investigation

Reported Cases of Enforced Disappearances

520,000 US

347,000 India

247,000 UK

21,000 Sri Lanka

11,000 Germany

than the global average of 21 percent.

Way Forward

The missing persons’ issue is a global challenge, driven by weak law enforcement, prolonged conflicts, economic difficulties, and proxy wars. Officials maintain that the progress is real and measurable: authorities have significantly reduced the number of enforced disappearances, resolved the majority of cases, and established relevant laws and institutions. Yet the work is far from complete. The path forward lies in sustained effort, preventive measures, and recognizing that every single case deserves attention. For now, the numbers tell their own story: Pakistan is not

facing an unchecked crisis of enforced disappearances but has made visible progress in addressing a complex issue, a progress often obscured amid propaganda.

“

In several instances, men labelled as “missing” were later found to be active members of terrorist outfits, living in Afghanistan or elsewhere.



Tayyab Baloch, reportedly missing since April 2024, was found to be linked to the Bela FC camp attack.



CHALLENGES AND CHOICES IN BALOCHISTAN

Senator Kamran Murtaza reflects on politics, governance and development in his province

By BP Team

Balochistan faces persistent security challenges, governance gaps, foreign interference, and disputes over resources—along with the urgent need for sustained economic and social development. In an exclusive conversation with *Balochistan Pulse*, Senator Kamran Murtaza, senior Supreme Court lawyer, former Bar Association president, and seasoned JUI-F politician, reflects on these issues and the choices facing Pakistan's largest yet most complex province.

BP: Terrorism has been on the rise, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Your party has governed both provinces in the past. What do you think is driving this increase in violence?

KM: There are many reasons. Yes, there's a governance issue. Yes, there's terrorism. And yes, foreign interference exists. But that interference only becomes effective when there's space for it. That space has been allowed to develop — and it must now be reclaimed.

BP: During your party's time in power, was there genuine public representation? Were conditions better then?

KM: Definitely. Back then, things hadn't deteriorated to this extent. I'm referring to a time before Imran Khan's government in 2018. They conceded too much, and after that, successive governments worsened the situation.

BP: Given UN reports about Balochistan-based terror groups like the TTP and BLA operating from Afghanistan, should your party leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman—who has historical ties with the Taliban—mediate with them?

KM: Maulana Sahib holds no official government

position to mediate on his own. But if the state formally asks him, we've always said he can play a constructive role. He's capable of engaging both in Balochistan and Afghanistan.

He went on an extensive visit to Kabul during President Karzai's time. I have said on many occasions that Maulana should be engaged, but the government has been reluctant.

“

Maulana Fazlur Rehman can play a role in talks with terror groups if the state assigns him that responsibility.

BP: Given violent incidents like the Jaffar Express hijacking and attacks on lawyers and schools, is it still viable to pursue talks with the BLA and other banned groups?

KM: Look, in the past, even individuals who came down from the mountains were rewarded with perks. Dr. Abdul Malik's government tried to open dialogue, yes, it failed, but a solution must still be found.

The government should show full seriousness in addressing this issue.



Kamran Murtaza speaks during a Senate session.



Kamran Murtaza with High Commissioner of Rwanda Harerimana Fatou at the Senate Secretariat in Islamabad.

BP: A recent incident at UMT Lahore revealed a student linked to the banned terrorist outfit BLA. Why is this happening in academic institutions?

KM: It's the allure of romanticised notions of freedom, particularly among youth. They're at an impressionable age, and some narratives attract them. But full separation is neither realistic nor possible.

BP: How do you see the implementation of the state's Paigham-e-Pakistan narrative against terrorism and extremism in Balochistan?

KM: No doubt, Pakistan is our homeland, and it must remain intact. But for a narrative like Paigham-e-Pakistan to take root, you must first prepare the ground. You can't sow seeds without first plowing, watering, and fertilising the land. Right now, those preparatory steps are missing.

BP: Besides politics, what do you see as another big hurdle to Balochistan's progress?

KM: Political rights are the root issue. Without them, true economic or social development is not possible. Elected representatives should perform — not merely occupy office. The current government seems to be doing a job, not delivering on promises.

BP: Why doesn't PTI have a significant presence in Balochistan?

KM: People in Balochistan are politically very mature. PTI's support in other provinces largely comes from

youth, but our youth are more grounded and conscious of their political rights. PTI's populist mindset doesn't appeal to the people of Balochistan.

BP: You challenged the Mines and Minerals Bill. Why?

KM: Pakistan is based on a social contract — call it constitutional or civic. You cannot bypass that with unilateral decisions. Articles like 172 of the Constitution make it clear that provincial rights must be respected. Any federal overreach undermines that principle. It must be resolved through dialogue.

“
BLA and other groups can create disturbance but they are demanding.

BP: Does Balochistan have the human and technical capacity to manage its mineral resources?

KM: Perhaps not fully yet, but it should still be the province's call. Capacity can and should be built with time.

BP: As a representative of Balochistan, what message do you want to give your people?

KM: I urge the people of Balochistan to seek their rights through constitutional and peaceful means. Sooner or later, we will achieve our rightful place — but it must happen within the framework of the Constitution and law.

BP: There's a strong narrative around enforced disappearances. How do you see this issue? Many missing persons are claimed to be linked with banned outfits.

KM: The figures being presented are highly exaggerated.

We know which cases are genuine and which are not. However, this issue must be addressed transparently so that nothing remains hidden.

BP: How do you view the government of Mir Sarfraz Bugti?

KM: He's my friend, but politically, I am not satisfied with his performance.

BP: Your party awarded a Senate ticket to Ahmed Khan Khilji, which was opposed by some within your ranks. Why was he chosen?

KM: In a democratic process, everyone has the right to criticise leadership decisions. I was denied a Senate ticket in 2009 myself. These things happen in politics.

BP: Senator Talha recently joined PPP during the Senate elections and secured a seat from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Why did he leave JUI-F?

KM: Senator Talha was rewarded with ministries and key committee roles by our party in the past. Yet, as the saying goes, those who do the most good for you are often the ones you should be most cautious of.

Senator Kamran Murtaza's conversation highlights the province's enduring challenges, including governance, security and the search for political balance. His message is clear: the road to stability lies within the Constitution, not outside it.



Kamran Murtaza with former Supreme Court Chief Justice Nasirul Mulk.



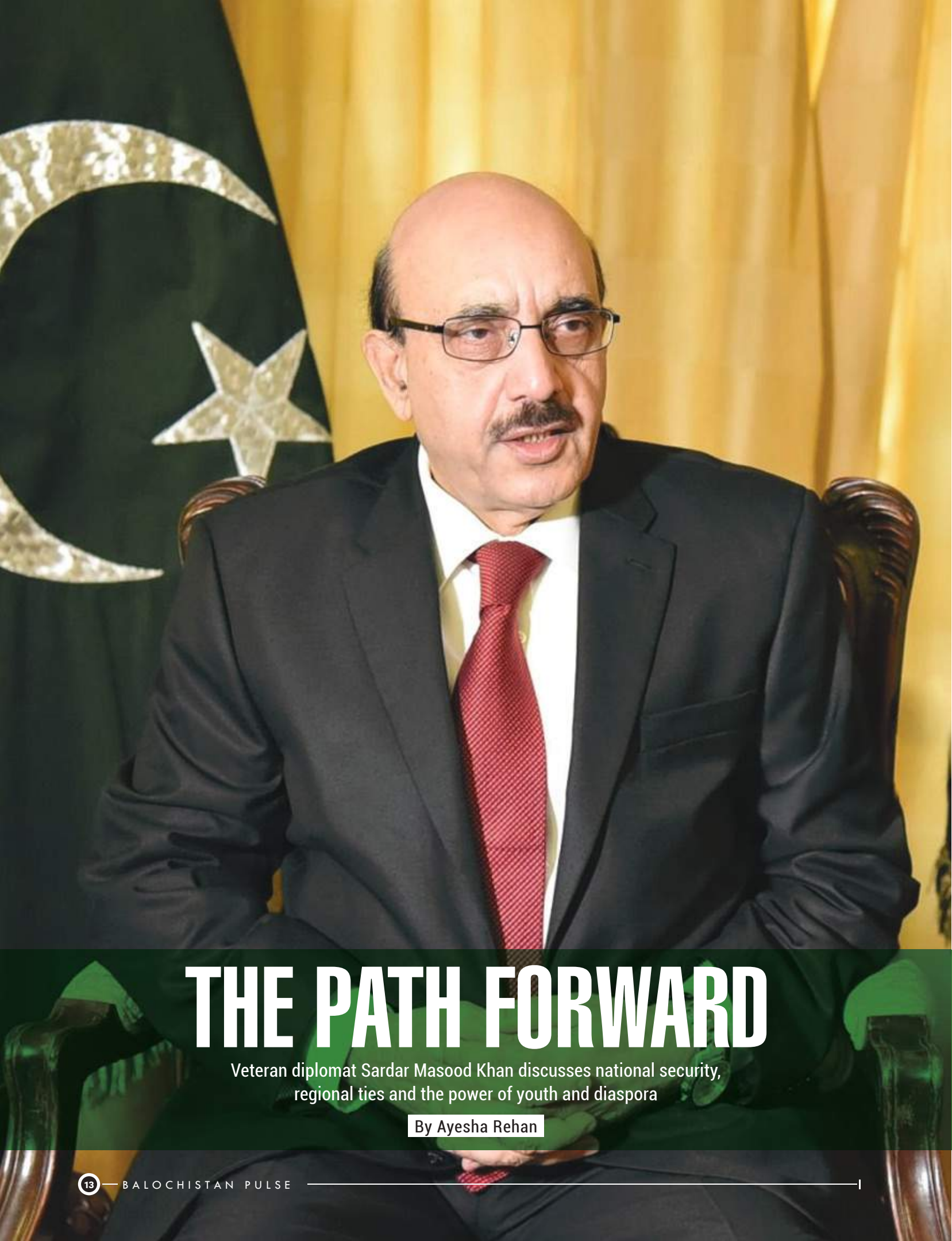
Senator Kamran Murtaza with JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman.



Senator Kamran Murtaza with JUI-F leaders in Quetta.



Kamran Murtaza leads a lawyers delegation during a meeting with Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti in Quetta.



THE PATH FORWARD

Veteran diplomat Sardar Masood Khan discusses national security, regional ties and the power of youth and diaspora

By Ayesha Rehan

Pakistan today faces a complex set of challenges, from India's hostile doctrine and terrorism in Balochistan to instability in Afghanistan, shifting dynamics in Bangladesh and the pressures of a rapidly changing global order. At the same time, opportunities exist in regional diplomacy, economic cooperation, technological advancement and the strength of Pakistan's diaspora and youth. In this context, Balochistan Pulse sits down with Sardar Masood Khan, former president of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, China and the United Nations, to hear his insights on where Pakistan stands and the path it must chart for the future.

BP: Relations between Pakistan and the United States have improved lately. An American newspaper recently called Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir the "Iron Man." How significant is this for Pakistan? And why is it important to maintain good relations with the US?

SMK: Pakistan is a major country and has historically maintained good relations with the United States. There have been difficulties at times, but overall our ties have remained strong. At one point, we were described as the "Most Allied Ally," meaning among their closest partners. Therefore, if Americans are calling Field Marshal Asim Munir the Iron Man, we should take pride in it. Furthermore, Pakistan's armed forces and the US military share longstanding ties. These relations began in the 1950s and took various forms, including training, cooperation and exchanges. This institutional relationship continues to strengthen cooperation.

BP: How did Pakistan achieve such closeness with the US, both then and now?

SMK: Pakistan's closeness with the US has always involved mutual interests. Pakistan, being a large country, holds immense strategic importance. If you connect Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Pakistan lies at the heart of this hemisphere. It has direct dealings with India and acts as a bridge to East Asia, particularly China. In the past, Pakistan played a pivotal role in improving US-China ties. That was one major reason.

Another reason is effective diplomacy by our political leaders and military rulers, who worked hard in Washington and with institutions like the Pentagon. For instance, General Michael Erik Kurilla, the CENTCOM commander, visited Pakistan multiple times after 2021.



As the ambassador to the US, Masood Khan meets President Joe Biden at the White House on July 9, 2022.

He reviewed the situation closely and concluded that Pakistan cannot be ignored.

The third factor is economic. America's interest in Pakistan's economy has grown, especially in critical minerals, including lithium, rare earths, copper, cobalt and gold, all found in Pakistan. Recently, America also expressed intent to invest in Pakistan's oil sector. It recently imposed a 19 per cent tariff on certain goods under its trade policy with us. It's still the lowest in the region, far lower than Bangladesh and especially India, which pays nearly 50 per cent. On oil, Pakistan holds verified offshore and inland reserves, including shale gas and shale oil, offering another

major opportunity. This opens further avenues of cooperation. But let me add: during the war with India in May, Pakistan's role was exemplary. On the military front, we achieved significant success; politically too, we gained advantages. And in terms of narrative, Pakistan emerged stronger. Here, the US also played a constructive role by brokering a ceasefire through Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio under President Trump's guidance. Pakistan expressed gratitude for this but India denied US involvement.

BP: And even soon after the ceasefire, India began accusations, even targeting soft spots like Balochistan.

SMK: Yes. India relied heavily on lies. Six of their aircraft were destroyed, but they never admitted

“
Today's improved Islamabad-Washington relations are rooted in constructive diplomacy, critical interventions and recognition of Pakistan's significance

it. Some leaks appeared abroad but were never acknowledged officially. Their losses damaged the reputation of French Rafale jets, so they covered it up with falsehoods. They claimed to have shot down six Pakistani aircraft. But where are the wreckages? What proof do they have? None. The reality is they could not even down a bird in Pakistani airspace. Their narrative was fabricated. President Trump was displeased with India's behaviour. Instead of thanking him, India dismissed his role, though Trump had saved India from immense losses. By May 10, 2025, we had already initiated Operation Banyan Marsoos and had it continued, India would have faced severe punishment. So, Trump's intervention saved India. This is why improved Pakistan-US ties today are rooted in constructive diplomacy, critical interventions and recognition of Pakistan's significance.

BP: The US recently declared the BLA a terrorist organisation. Given Pakistan's ties with China and Russia, can Pakistan rally the two major world powers to follow suit?
SMK: Yes. The US has declared the Majeed Brigade and the BLA as foreign terrorist organisations. Though belated, it was the right decision. American and regional intelligence were fully aware of India's role, through RAW and its military, in using proxies against Pakistan. Now, the US has exposed them globally. India constantly plays the terrorism card to isolate Pakistan.

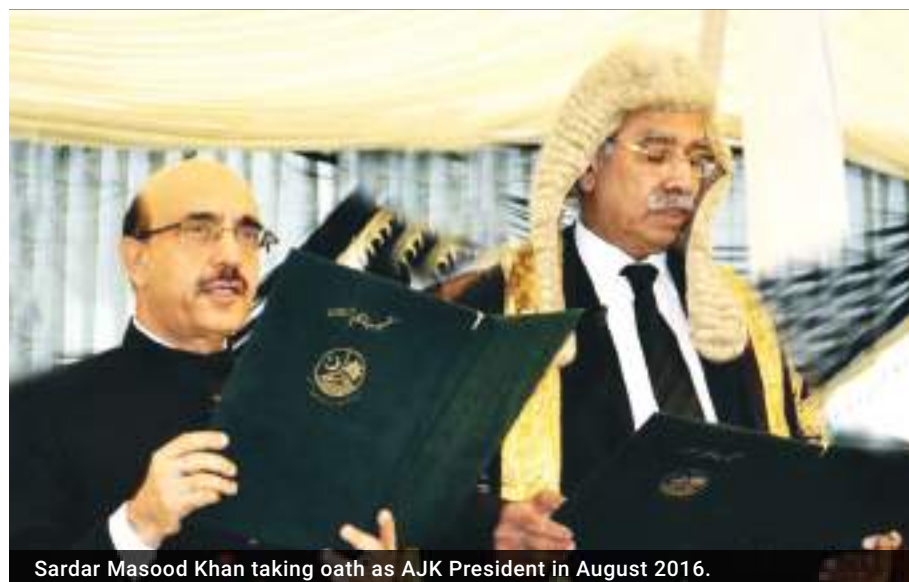


As Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Sardar Masood Khan addresses the General Assembly in November 2013.

But today, India's own terrorism is on the global agenda. We had earlier submitted solid evidence of India's involvement to the UN Secretary-General, the Security Council and the General Assembly and to capitals of the five permanent members. Now, we must also press Moscow and Beijing to name these terror groups specifically, not just condemn terrorism in general.

BP: Doesn't the involvement of educated youth, like the recently detained lecturer Dr Usman Qazi and slain student Sufian Kurd, in Balochistan's terror networks directly expose India's wider strategy of destabilising Pakistan, with "Operation Sundoor" as a central component?
SMK: India's military doctrine is founded on criminality and subversion. On one hand, it arrogates to itself the right to carry out unilateral strikes inside Pakistan; on

the other, it openly orchestrates and exports terrorism into Pakistan. This hypocrisy has laid bare India's true face before the world: a terrorist state. Previously, this was dismissed as just India-Pakistan blame games. But today, India's terrorism is exposed globally. In Canada, they assassinated a Sikh leader. In the US, they attempted to kill Sikh leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The plan was caught red-handed. So, the terrorism in Balochistan is not just "Operation Sundoor." It is part of India's longstanding strategy against Pakistan. "Operation Sundoor" was linked with Pahalgam and provided



Sardar Masood Khan taking oath as AJK President in August 2016.

India a fabricated pretext for aggression. What India initiated in May 6-7 continues in different forms today.

BP: In your view, how significant was the recent Kabul meeting between the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan, particularly for easing tensions and shaping future cooperation?

SMK: I believe the recent dialogue of the Pakistani, Chinese and Afghan foreign ministers in Kabul is a very positive development. After 2021, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan had become extremely strained because the banned terrorist outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) used Afghan soil to launch attacks on Pakistan, targeting not only civilians but also our security personnel. This new phase of diplomacy has helped reduce tensions. It shows that China, Afghanistan and Pakistan are not only coming closer but also opening a path toward stability and cooperation.

BP: Do you think this process can also resolve differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan? Instead of suspicion and confrontation, could both countries build economic cooperation and political engagement?

SMK: Exactly. That is the real opportunity before us. Instead of letting mistrust or conflict dominate the relationship, we should use this environment to foster economic interaction and political connectivity.



Sardar Masood Khan with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad in August 2016.

BP: China has expressed its desire to include Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. From your perspective, how would that benefit Pakistan?

SMK: This idea has always been on the table in one form or another. When I was serving as Pakistan's ambassador to China from 2008 to 2012, the proposal was already being discussed even though work on CPEC had not formally begun at the time. China suggested that if industrial and trade activity were initiated in the border regions shared by Pakistan and Afghanistan

and if agricultural and technological cooperation were developed, both countries would become economically interdependent. Pakistan and Afghanistan already share

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American and regional intelligence were fully aware of India's role in using proxies against Pakistan. Now, the US has exposed them globally by declaring BLA and the Majeed Brigade as foreign terrorist organisations.



Sardar Masood Khan during a visit to the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo.

cultural and familial ties. However, the proposal did not fully materialise back then because the War on Terror was at its peak. The United States had also introduced a similar initiative called ROZs (Reconstruction Opportunity Zones), aimed at integrating tribal regions and border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan into broader frameworks of growth. Now, the idea has resurfaced with new energy. CPEC has already proven highly beneficial for Pakistan. If Afghanistan joins, it will open up even more avenues of cooperation. And let me explain how. If peace returns to Afghanistan and groups like TTP, ISIS and al-Qaeda are weakened, regional cooperation will increase and several important initiatives could materialise. For instance, the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan railroad project could finally begin. When our prime minister visited Afghanistan a few weeks ago, an agreement on this initiative was signed. Second, the long-discussed TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) gas pipeline could also be revived.

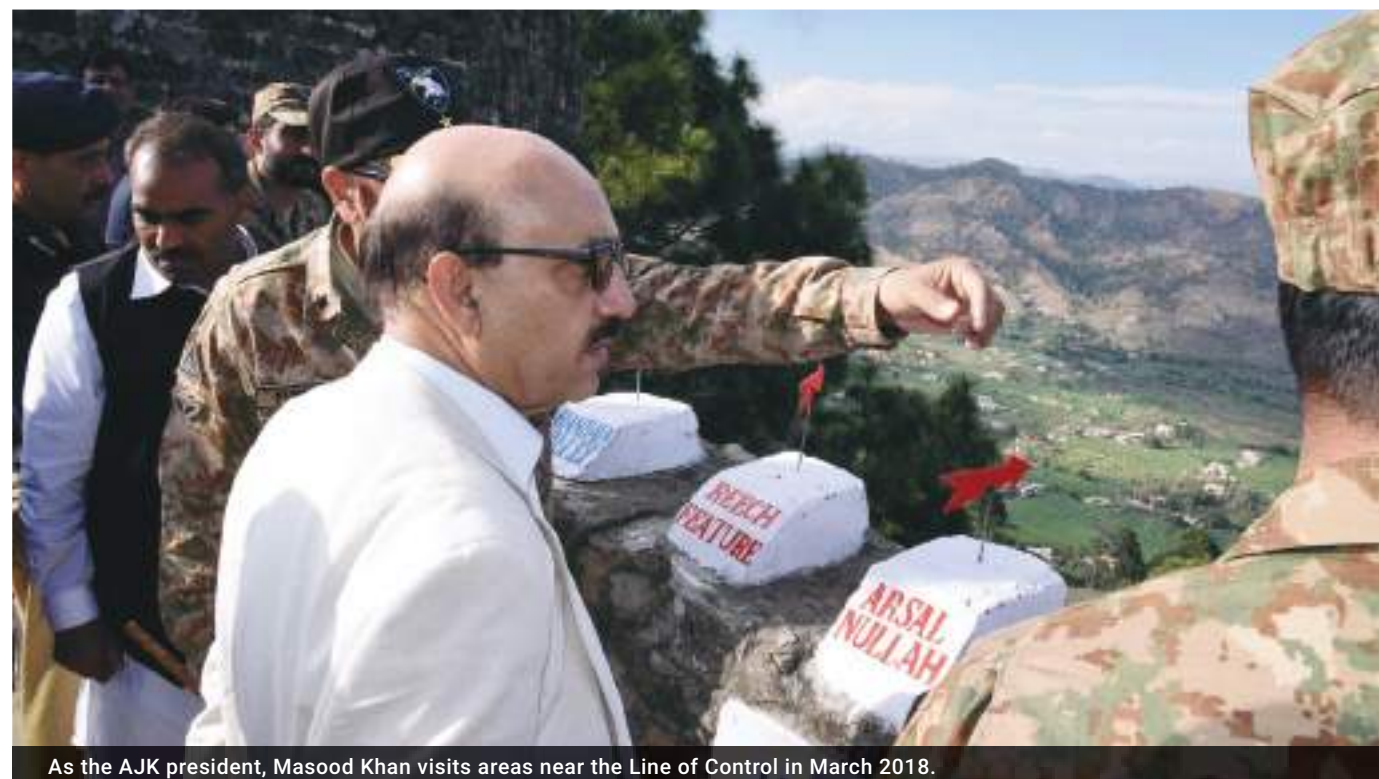
BP: If China wants Afghanistan included in CPEC, does that imply Beijing could help eliminate terror groups operating from Afghan soil against Pakistan?
SMK: China has its own concerns regarding terrorism. For example, the ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement), which carries out attacks in Xinjiang

in northwest China, still maintains some bases in Afghanistan. This is one reason why the Wakhan Corridor between Afghanistan and China has not been fully opened. If stability improves, terrorism can be reduced and direct trade between Afghanistan and China could be established through this corridor. So, given China's influence, Afghanistan will certainly take its position into account and also listen to Pakistan. For example, through diplomacy, Mullah Hibatullah, the Supreme Leader of Afghanistan, has given multiple assurances. He promised to take measures to protect Pakistan from the TTP threat; for instance, by relocating them away from the border, either toward central Afghanistan or further west. It is clear that where terrorism exists, there can be no economic or political cooperation. That is why this must be seen as successful diplomacy not only for Pakistan and Afghanistan but also for China.



CPEC has proven highly beneficial for Pakistan. If Afghanistan joins, it will open up even more avenues of cooperation.

BP: Recently, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar visited Bangladesh, the first such visit since Sheikh Hasina's government ended in August 2024 after mass protests. How do you view this development?
SMK: It was very positive. The discussions were fruitful and forward-looking. There had already been earlier contacts; our interior minister engaged with his counterpart and our Prime Minister met Dr



As the AJK president, Masood Khan visits areas near the Line of Control in March 2018.



As the AJK president, Masood Khan visits King Abdullah Campus of the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Yunus. Similarly, our trade minister had engaged with his Bangladeshi counterpart. Since August 2024, engagement has been consistent. What made this visit important was that it was not symbolic; it produced concrete outcomes. Both sides agreed to expand trade and established a Joint Trade Commission. Our current trade is around \$700 million; the target is \$1 billion. There will be student exchanges, visa facilitation for diplomats and cooperation in technology, culture and other areas. This was not just optics; it was about real decisions that strengthen ties. Let me add one important point. Bangladesh will hold elections in February 2026. Jamaat-i-Islami and the Bangladesh National Party along with students, who were behind the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government, may form a government, either in coalition or one may secure a majority. It's too early to say. That's why the decisions we are taking now with Bangladesh should be institutionalised. The Indian lobby is working to bring the Awami League back to power and disrupt progress in Pakistan–Bangladesh ties. All goodwill and positive decisions must be consolidated so that they cannot be reversed.

BP: Looking ahead, what would be your three key recommendations for Pakistan's foreign policy?

SMK: First, Pakistan must start seeing itself as a major country, not a small one. If you perceive yourself as small, your thinking remains limited. With China, the US, Russia or Europe, you behave in a subordinate way. Instead, we must adopt an independent mindset. Second, we must avoid the outdated dilemma of balancing only between China and the US. We must broaden horizons: strengthen ties with West Asia, the Middle East, Africa, North America and Southeast



We must move beyond the 1950s mindset. The world has changed; Pakistan's diplomacy must evolve.

Asia, besides expanding exports, attracting investment and moving beyond the 1950s mindset. The world has changed; Pakistan's diplomacy must evolve. Third, we must focus on new technologies. The core of our economic diplomacy should be Generative AI, blockchain, robotics, Internet of Things and 3D printing. Pakistan has an advantage; our people are educated and adaptable. Harnessing technology will

strengthen our economy and redefine our global role. Pakistan has a powerful diaspora, with 10–12 million hardworking and professional citizens living abroad. Harnessing their talent and resources can take the country much further. At home, our greatest strength lies in our youth: nearly 150–170 million Pakistanis are under 30. As they step into practical life, this generation must resolve that by 2047, Pakistan will rise as one of the world's leading economic, political and strategic powers.

THE SAUDI PACT AND BEYOND

Minister Prof. Ahsan Iqbal explains how new alliances are shaping Pakistan's path to stability and peace

By Jamila Zareef

In a shifting South Asian landscape, Pakistan is redefining its role through bold diplomacy, economic revival, and military clarity. In this wide-ranging conversation with *Balochistan Pulse*, Minister for Planning and Development Prof. Ahsan Iqbal discusses the significance of the Pakistan–Saudi Defence Pact, the lessons of Marka-e-Haq, and why peace – not war – remains Pakistan's guiding principle.

BP: The Pakistan–Saudi Defence Agreement has been described as a strategic milestone. How does this reshape Pakistan's role in the regional and global security architecture?

AI: It is indeed a historic milestone – one that marks a turning point in Pakistan's global identity and standing. Pakistan's bold and calculated response to Indian aggression in May this year – the Marka-e-Haq operation – played a defining role in this transformation.

Saudi Arabia has always been one of Pakistan's most trusted strategic partners. Our relationship spans decades of cooperation – economic, military, and diplomatic. Saudi Arabia remains Pakistan's largest source of remittances and has stood by us through every economic challenge. In turn, Pakistani engineers, doctors, and workers have contributed immensely to the Kingdom's progress. In the defence domain, the bond is deep. We've trained Saudi Air Force and military officers, while our instructors and experts regularly serve in their institutions. It's a strong, enduring, and unshakeable partnership. For Pakistan, the Haramain Sharifain – the Two Holy Mosques – are an

article of faith. Protecting them is both our moral duty and religious responsibility. If ever they face a threat, Pakistan will stand as a frontline state. This is not just the government's position – it reflects the conviction of 240 million Pakistanis.

BP: You've called Marka-e-Haq a threshold moment. What developments during that conflict reshaped Pakistan's regional stature?

AI: Marka-e-Haq was a decisive test of resolve. It demonstrated Pakistan's strategic clarity and conventional capability. The operation shattered India's illusion of regional dominance and proved that Pakistan's traditional defence strength alone is enough to neutralize aggression. We didn't need to rely on nuclear deterrence – our preparedness, discipline, and professionalism spoke for themselves.



Pakistani and Saudi leaders in Riyadh after signing the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement.

BP: Pakistan has faced economic turbulence in the past. How has the current leadership restored global confidence and created space for new strategic partnerships like this pact?

AI: The previous regime's mismanagement severely damaged Pakistan's economy and international credibility. But through courageous reforms, political stability, and coordinated statecraft, we have turned the tide. Economic recovery has restored confidence in Pakistan's ability to deliver.

The synergy between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir has been central to this turnaround. When political leadership and the military establishment work in harmony for national progress and defence, the results are transformative – and the world notices.

BP: Field Marshal Asim Munir's leadership during Marka-e-Haq earned widespread praise. What qualities stood out to you in shaping Pakistan's military and diplomatic response?

AI: His leadership was defined by courage, discipline,



Pakistan's Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar Sidhu meets with commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force in Riyadh.

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When political leadership and the military establishment work in harmony for national progress and defence, the results are transformative – and the world notices



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir inspect a downed Indian drone at Pasrur Cantonment, Sialkot.

and foresight. The response to Indian aggression showed the world that Pakistan is a responsible yet formidable power — committed to peace, but never at the cost of its dignity or security. It reaffirmed our doctrine of “peace through strength.”

BP: India’s political circles and media appear unsettled by both Marka-e-Haq and the Pak–Saudi pact. What does that reveal about India’s long-standing regional narrative?

AI: For over three decades, India built an illusion of being the region’s uncontested superpower. Marka-e-Haq shattered that myth. They may not say it publicly, but India’s strategic community knows what happened.

Pakistan has always said — we do not seek war. We seek peace, because South Asia has lagged behind the rest of the world. The key to prosperity lies in regional integration, not confrontation. But every time Pakistan extends a hand of peace, India interprets it as weakness.

Unlike India, where the “Pakistan card” is used in domestic politics, no Pakistani leader plays an “India card.” That difference says everything. A nation with thousands of years of history should act with confidence, not paranoia.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

BP: India initially tried to portray the conflict as a border issue with China. What does that narrative shift suggest?

AI: It was a desperate deflection tactic to mask a military and political setback. By spinning the narrative, India sought to hide the truth — but the world isn’t blind. We’ve lived side by side for centuries. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was once a champion of Hindu–Muslim unity, but prejudice and injustice forced him to seek a separate homeland.

That same mindset, which Jinnah warned against, persists today — embodied in the Modi government’s ideology.

Even some of the extremist narratives that fuel terrorism



For over three decades, India built an illusion of being the region’s uncontested superpower. Marka-e-Haq shattered it.



A tower in Riyadh lit up with Pakistan and Saudi flags to celebrate defence pact.



in our region trace back to that intolerance. That’s why Pakistan cannot afford complacency. We remain vigilant, and we will never compromise on national security.

BP: Can you elaborate on the mutual defence clause in the Pakistan–Saudi pact? How does it enhance Pakistan’s deterrence and strategic depth?

AI: The pact is built on mutual defence — an attack on one will be considered an attack on both. It strengthens our deterrence and expands our strategic depth. More importantly, it reinforces Pakistan’s unwavering commitment to the protection of the Haramain Sharifain — a sacred trust for every Pakistani.

BP: India seems particularly alarmed by this development. Why?

AI: Because it upsets their assumed dominance. This agreement consolidates Pakistan’s alliances and



The pact is built on mutual defence — an attack on one will be considered an attack on both. It strengthens our deterrence and expands our strategic depth.

multiplies our strategic reach. But let me be clear: it’s not a declaration of war, it’s a declaration of deterrence and peace. The pact’s very purpose is to prevent conflict, not provoke it. It promotes regional balance and stability — something India should welcome, not fear.

BP: You’ve consistently advocated for peace in South Asia. What steps should India take to move from power projection to partnership?

AI: India needs to outgrow its obsession with self-glorification and superpower theatrics. South Asia needs dialogue, cooperation, and shared progress, not confrontation.

Conflict is a luxury this region cannot afford. If India showed a heart even one-fourth the size of its geography, South Asia would look very different today. Pakistan stands ready for peace — a peace based on dignity, equality, resolution of Kashmir dispute and mutual respect.



Military vehicles with ‘Nasr’ and ‘Babur’ missiles in Islamabad National Day parade.

CORRIDORS OF SHARED PROSPERITY

CPEC has helped Pakistan's economy and connections. Now, it aims for inclusive growth and new opportunities.

By Ahsan Iqbal



When the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was launched in 2013 as the flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative, it was little more than a bold vision on paper. Pakistan was facing crippling energy shortages, inadequate infrastructure and stagnant growth. Few could imagine how profoundly CPEC would transform the country's economic landscape within just a decade. Yet today, that vision has become a living reality, reshaping Pakistan's connectivity, energy security and development outlook while deepening our strategic partnership with China.

Energy and infrastructure Revolution

The first phase of CPEC has delivered what once seemed unimaginable. In energy, 17 major projects with a combined capacity of 8,904 megawatts were completed, supported by two coal mines and the country's first ±660 kV HVDC



transmission line, representing nearly \$18 billion of investment. These projects helped end the crippling power shortages that had darkened homes and stifled industries. The long-overlooked coal reserves of Thar are now producing electricity, powering factories and households, and providing Pakistan with much-needed energy security. For millions of citizens, CPEC has meant light in their homes, jobs in their communities and renewed hope in their future.

Beyond energy, CPEC's transport infrastructure has tied the country together like never before. Eight major projects worth \$6.7 billion have already added 888km of modern highways and motorways, while another 853km are under construction. Among them, the Havelian-Thakot section of the Karakoram Highway stands out as a flagship, internationally recognised for its excellence and strategic significance. These highways are arteries of commerce that reduce travel times, open new markets and bring previously isolated regions into the fold of national development

Alongside roads, the 820km optical fibre cable from Khunjerab Pass to Rawalpindi has given Pakistan its first land-based digital connectivity with China, while the Orange Line Metro Train has introduced modern, efficient public transport in Lahore. Step by step, CPEC has transformed the way Pakistanis move, trade and connect.

Nowhere is this transformation more visible than in Gwadar. Once a quiet fishing town, it is steadily evolving into Pakistan's maritime gateway. The port and its surrounding infrastructure, supported by grant-based Chinese projects, are reshaping the socio-economic landscape of Balochistan. A state-of-the-art hospital, a vocational training institute, a water desalination plant, solar home systems and the new Gwadar International Airport are improving the lives of local communities while positioning Gwadar as a hub of regional trade and connectivity. What was once a distant dream on the map is becoming a tangible reality on the ground.

Pathway to Growth

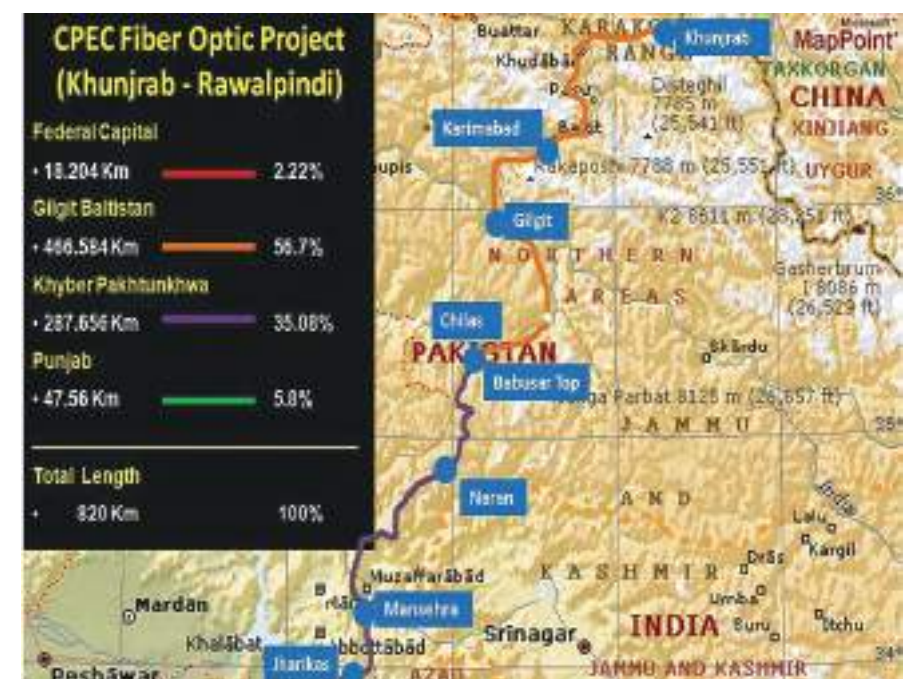
These achievements of Phase-I, however, are not an end in themselves. Foundations alone do not

build a house; they only prepare the ground. The next decade of CPEC must go beyond laying infrastructure to driving industrialisation, creating jobs, boosting exports and empowering people. This is the promise of CPEC Phase-II: to transform connectivity into commerce, infrastructure into opportunity and partnership into shared prosperity.

The roadmap for this transformation is being framed at the 14th Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting of CPEC. Pakistan and China will align the next phase with Pakistan's National Economic Transformation Plan, built on the 5Es framework: Exports, E-Pakistan, Energy/Environment, and Equity & Empowerment. To deliver on these priorities, CPEC Phase-II will advance through five new corridors of cooperation: Growth, Innovation, Green, Livelihood and Regional Connectivity. Each of these represents not just a project stream, but a vision for how Pakistan and China can shape a sustainable and inclusive future together.

Already, progress is visible. Special economic zones are under development, offering tax incentives, customs exemptions and modern infrastructure to attract investment. With affordable labour, a strategic location and improving energy and logistics, Pakistan is emerging as a competitive investment destination at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. These SEZs will not only bring in investment but also integrate Pakistani businesses into global value chains, create thousands of jobs and expand exports. Agriculture, too, is entering a new chapter. Pakistan

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Step by step, CPEC has transformed the way Pakistanis move, trade and connect.”



has begun exporting red chilies, sesame, beef, and animal skins to China, marking the rise of agri-exports under CPEC. But the real opportunity lies in modernisation. By introducing advanced technologies, improving research and applying modern farming practices, we can significantly increase yields, reduce post-harvest losses and improve farmer incomes. Collaboration with China's Xinjiang province, where agricultural technology is highly developed, offers great promise for accelerating this transformation. A modernised agriculture sector will not only ensure food security but also open new export markets, creating opportunities for rural communities and strengthening the national economy.

Inclusive & Sustainable

Technology and innovation will serve as another pillar of the next phase. Dedicated Joint Working Groups on Science and Technology and Information Technology have been formed to drive collaboration in cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, e-commerce and digital connectivity. Investments in fiber-optic networks, digital skills training and e-governance will build the foundations of a knowledge-based economy. For Pakistan's youth, this means not only competing globally in the industries of the future but also ensuring that the



The 1,320MW coal-fired power plant at Port Qasim, Karachi.



The operational 720MW Karot hydropower project in AJK and Punjab.



Pakistan and China enter new era of economic cooperation as Minister Ahsan Iqbal inaugurates 14th JCC meeting in Beijing.

benefits of digital transformation reach every citizen. The shift from government-to-government projects to business-to-business partnerships will define CPEC Phase-II. Private capital, entrepreneurial energy and technological innovation must now become central drivers of the corridor. This transformation is already taking shape. At the recent Pak-China B2B Investment Conference in Beijing, nearly 800 firms from both countries participated, resulting in joint ventures and MoUs worth \$8.5 billion. Such partnerships demonstrate the vast opportunities for collaboration and innovation beyond traditional state-led projects. To succeed, however, inclusivity and sustainability must be at the heart of CPEC's next phase. The benefits of this partnership must reach every province, district and household, not just the major cities. Equity and empowerment will ensure that prosperity is shared widely, while environmental safeguards will guarantee that growth is climate-resilient and sustainable. Pakistan has also taken strong measures to ensure the security of CPEC projects and personnel, recognising that peace and stability are the essential foundations for progress. Our commitment to providing a safe, enabling environment for investment and development remains unwavering.

Destiny Shaper

The first decade of CPEC gave Pakistan new roads, new power plants and a new port. The next decade must

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The shift from government-to-government projects to business-to-business partnerships will define CPEC's Phase-II.

give us new industries, new technologies, new markets and, above all, new opportunities for our people. It must create jobs, expand exports, strengthen sustainability and deepen regional integration. As Pakistan and China enter this next chapter, the challenge is not just to build more infrastructure, but to turn infrastructure into opportunity and opportunity into prosperity. The first decade of CPEC changed Pakistan's landscape. The next decade can change its destiny. Together, Pakistan and China must ensure that CPEC is not just remembered as a corridor of concrete, but celebrated as a corridor of hope, progress and shared prosperity for our two nations and for the wider region.

The writer is the federal minister for planning, development, and special initiatives. He tweets/posts @betterpakistan and can be reached at: minister@pc.gov.pk

WHY OUR YOUTH ARE ADrift

Prof Dr Masoom Yasinzai explains how real learning can unite people and rebuild society

By BP Report



In Pakistan's education landscape, Prof Dr Masoom Yasinzai stands out as a figure of respect and inspiration. Rising from Balochistan, the country's most disadvantaged province, he built a remarkable career through perseverance and vision. Over 45 years, he has led premier institutions such as Quaid-i-Azam University and the International Islamic University, earning the Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his contributions. Now back in Quetta, he is devoted to advancing education in his home province. Balochistan Pulse speaks with him about how education can foster unity, strengthen society and tackle the estrangement felt by young people.

BP: You've devoted your life to education and lead an institution known for quality learning. Yet in Balochistan, many educated youths voice a sense of alienation rather than unity. Why is this so?

MY: I prefer to look at this issue through the broader lens of education. The true purpose of education is to enlighten minds, build character and nurture a sense of belonging to one's nation. When these elements are missing, learning becomes hollow. True education isn't about collecting degrees; it's about cultivating integrity, faith and purpose. Sadly, our system often neglects these values, leaving students morally and emotionally adrift.

Reform is urgent. I recently wrote a candid piece exposing the flaws in our education and examination systems, but when I tried to publish it, editors hesitated. I had asked a simple question: What kind of education are we providing? We are leading our children toward failure. If this is the quality of our teaching, how can we expect the youth to stay on the right path? If I were in their place, I too might have gone astray, because such education offers nothing of real worth.

We have forgotten what teaching truly means. Many teachers now see their profession merely as a job rather than a mission. That is one of the greatest flaws in our institutions, and a key reason why young people have lost direction. If classrooms fail to inspire and the foundation of learning remains hollow, negative influences will easily sway these young minds. Our



Prof. Masoom Yasinzai, IIUI Rector, with Defence Production Minister Zubaida Jalal at the inauguration of a training workshop.

duty is to anchor them, to engage them so deeply in knowledge and reflection that they find meaning within education itself.

BP: If universities can shape character and belonging, how can we ensure this happens for every student in Balochistan?

MY: Ensuring this for every student in Balochistan requires creating universities that are more than just classrooms. I once represented Pakistan at an international dialogue on higher education in Colombo. Over dinner, I asked two vice-chancellors from Tamil

Nadu how their province had achieved such progress. Their answer surprised me. "We brought everything into the universities," one of them said. "We turned campuses into living spaces, full of debates, sports, discussions and creative activities. We made higher education the centre of community life." That idea struck me deeply. Universities must

not only teach; they must shape character and provide belonging. When students are engaged intellectually and emotionally, they stop looking for identity elsewhere. During my tenure as Vice Chancellor at the University of Balochistan, a turbulent period followed the assassination of Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti. Students were angry, the environment volatile and running the university became an enormous challenge. Later, when I became Rector at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, I carried those lessons with me. The institution's mission was broader: promoting harmony and collective progress across the Muslim world.

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Many teachers now see their profession merely as a job rather than a mission, a key reason why young people have lost their direction.

One of my first initiatives was to invite 15 students from Balochistan to Islamabad for two weeks. We hosted them at the university guesthouse near the Margalla Hills, arranged lectures, cultural activities and open discussions. In the beginning, I could see bitterness on their faces. But as they interacted with students from across Pakistan and abroad, their hostility softened. They realised there was no hatred; only respect and kindness. By the time they left, their outlook had completely changed. That experience taught me a vital truth: when young people feel valued and respected, they naturally begin to think, this country is mine. I must build it.

That is the mindset we need to cultivate, especially among our youth. They must stop asking why they should destroy themselves and instead ask how they can build themselves first. Nation-building begins with self-building; you cannot pour from an empty cup.

Another experience comes to mind. When I was invited by the University of Sistan and Baluchistan in Iran, I travelled by road through Saindak. A former student asked me to stay overnight and showed me around the copper-gold project. To my surprise, apart from him and a few lower-grade workers, there



Prof. Masoom Yasinzai meets with President Mamnoon Hussain in 2018.

were almost no local employees. That moment struck me deeply: had we properly educated and trained our youth, they would have been running that plant. Instead, outsiders had taken their place. That day, I understood the cost of educational neglect.

Later, during my time at the University of Balochistan, the federal government offered to establish two new universities. I travelled across the province to identify potential sites. At the Girls College in Turbat, I saw classrooms so overcrowded that many students sat on the floor but still attended lectures with passion. I thought, this is where a university belongs. I then

visited Loralai, which also had strong potential because of its surrounding districts. I proposed sub-campus in both Turbat and Loralai, and they were approved under the University of Balochistan.

In Loralai, local MPA Muhammad Khan Toor Utmankhel generously donated 550 acres of community land. In Turbat, the provincial finance minister helped us obtain 1,000 acres, and a philanthropist provided a building rent-free to start classes immediately. When we inaugurated those campuses, the local communities stood shoulder to shoulder with us. I told them: "What you are opening today is not just a building; it



Prof Masoom Yasinzai at the launch of a thematic calendar on Maulana Rumi's poetry and wisdom.

is your future. If we nurture it well, it will make you custodians of your own resources."

Wherever a university rises, towns begin to flourish. Education brings light; it replaces conflict with understanding. Once people are truly educated, they realise that violence is not their mission. Even when they demand their rights, they do it through reason and dialogue and not destruction. Education shows the way forward; it pulls societies out of darkness, darkness that comes from ignorance, hopelessness and alienation.

That is why I always say: if we provide education in its true spirit, one that builds knowledge, character and belonging; such dark times will never return.

BP: You mentioned the university in Turbat. Makran Division, once seen as backward, now leads in literacy, a testament to the region's dedication and belief in education. Where opportunities were once scarce, its youth are now setting an inspiring example.

MY: This is a remarkable achievement. I hope and pray that people truly understand that the key lies in creating an environment where education can thrive. Once that happens, students from across the country and even abroad will be drawn here. International scholars will visit, bringing technology, knowledge and fresh ideas that can uplift the entire region. The government can build universities, fund operations and pay salaries, but the real progress must come from the local people who make these institutions flourish for their own development.

BP: You often emphasise harmony in educational spaces. How does that translate inside the classroom?

MY: In our classrooms, students may disagree, but



Prof. Masoom Yasinzai with Peter Brennan, Minister-Counselor at the U.S. Embassy.

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Once people are truly educated, they realise that violence is not their mission. Even when they demand their rights, they do it through reason and dialogue and not destruction.

they never turn disagreement into hostility. We tell them: hold on to your opinion, debate respectfully and apply the same principle in society. In our faith, three to five percent of jurisprudence involves differences of opinion, and that diversity has always strengthened Islamic scholarship. Disagreement, when guided by respect, leads to research, reflection and growth; hostility, on the other hand, destroys. That's why we say: never turn differences into enmity. Our university promoted this spirit by bringing together scholars from all schools of



Prof. Masoom Yasinzai at an event in Quetta on Balochistan's education landscape.

thought. During my tenure as Rector of the International Islamic University, we issued joint declarations for unity and mutual respect.

One of the most important initiatives was Paigham-e-Pakistan in 2018, a national narrative endorsed by leading scholars, jurists, and institutions. It declared all forms of terrorism, rebellion and suicide attacks as strictly forbidden in Islam, promoting tolerance, harmony, and respect for life.

BP: How did Paigham-e-Pakistan address extremism within a religious framework?

MY: It defined extremism as *fasad fil-ardh* (spreading chaos on earth), something the Holy Quran strongly condemns. We presented the declaration to the presidency, and it was later endorsed by the Council of Islamic Ideology and Parliament. The message was clear: no one has the right to spread hate speech or incite violence. Differences should remain within scholarly circles, not among the masses, who may misinterpret them emotionally. Islam calls for moderation, balance and respect.

I remember addressing a group of visiting American professors who expected hostility. I told them, "We do not hate you; we love you." They were astonished. I explained that love in Islam means justice and compassion, not agreement. If I hate someone, how can I convey the beauty of my faith? Islam teaches us to win hearts through respect, not hatred.

That is the same message

Paigham-e-Pakistan gave the nation: Islam forbids violence, upholds the rights of others, and calls for unity. As then-President Mamnoon Hussain said at its launch, this was a historic document, one to unite the nation against extremism and remind us that Islam is a religion of peace and balance.

BP: Policies matter a lot. If we follow the principles from the era of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), how different would Balochistan's situation be today?

MY: Policies are made by governments, but we all play a role. Each of us, through our work and conduct, helps shape society's direction. Our Prophet's life offers us the greatest policy model, built on justice, compassion and tolerance.

When we celebrate 12th Rabiul Awal, the birthday of the Prophet (PBUH), our happiness should not be limited to rituals; it should inspire us to live by his teachings. One key lesson is tolerance. During the Treaty of Hudaibiyah when the Prophet accepted even the removal of the expression "Messenger of Allah" from

the agreement for the sake of peace, he demonstrated remarkable patience and restraint, something his companions found difficult to accept. That act defined true tolerance.

Today, our biggest loss is the disappearance of that value. Society cannot progress without tolerance and peace. The Prophet's message teaches us coexistence and respect. When peace disappears, families worry, schools close and nations decline. If we restore prophetic values of tolerance, justice and peace, our society can prosper.

BP: Nation-building is crucial and teachers play a defining role in shaping nations. How do you see our progress toward becoming a better nation?

MY: A teacher must rediscover his true role. Let me tell you a story from my own life.

In 1980, I completed my Master's at the University of Balochistan, a small institution back then, with only a few departments and around 3,000 students. When the

exam results were announced, I stood first in all faculties. The same day, the vice chancellor's personal assistant came to call me. I was nervous; why would the vice chancellor want to see a student? But when I got there, the vice chancellor asked a single question: "Will you work with us?" Without hesitation, I said yes. On his instructions, I wrote an application right there and within an hour, I was appointed a lecturer. When I got home and told everyone about the appointment,

my father, a tribal elder we rarely spoke before, called me. "I've heard that you've joined the university as a teacher?" he asked. "Yes, Agha," I said. "I was offered the position."

He nodded and said, "Let me tell you a story. When I was in Pishin, there was a principal named Mr Siddiqui. Tell me, which village do you think he was from?"

I replied, "Not from Pishin, perhaps from Sindh or Punjab?" "Right," he said. "He came from Karachi.

During school hours, no teacher or student was ever outside class. After school, he'd roam the streets in the scorching sun. If he saw a student wandering, he'd take him home and tell the parents, 'Till two o'clock he was my responsibility; now he's yours.'"

Then my father asked, "Do you think he was paid extra for that?" "Of course not," I said.

He smiled. "That's commitment and passion. If you have that, stay in teaching. If not, leave it."

From that day, I resolved to serve with full sincerity, and I've held to that promise ever since.

It has now been forty-five years. I still take two classes

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Disagreement, when guided by respect, leads to research, reflection and growth; hostility, on the other hand, destroys. That's why we say: never turn differences into enmity.

every day, not because I have to, but because I believe that even one student may learn something that changes his life.

BP: Many argue that schools and universities focus too much on infrastructure and exams. How important is the teacher's role in shaping students and society?

MY: Unfortunately, many teachers today see their work merely as a job. They've forgotten the spirit of guidance and mentorship. The bond between teacher and student has weakened as each walks his own path. A teacher doesn't need to become a friend to the student, but he must be close enough to inspire respect and imitation. Students should look at their teachers as role models. Everything in an institution revolves around a good teacher and not buildings or budgets. I saw this vividly when I visited Qufu, a traditional centre of Confucianism in China. The guide took me to a tree and said, "Philosopher Confucius used to sit here and teach." His teachings spread across generations, not because of infrastructure but because of passion and purpose. That's the spirit we have lost. We build universities and spend money, but if the teacher lacks sincerity and commitment, nothing changes.

I often tell young teachers that there is deep joy in seeing your students succeed. Once, during a meeting of the National Assembly's education committee, where I was invited as Vice Chancellor of the International Islamic University, a woman walked up to me and kissed my hand. The committee chairman asked who

she was. I said I didn't recognise her, but she smiled and said, "You were my teacher at the University of Balochistan." That moment reminded me why teaching is sacred. You may forget your students, but they never forget the person who believed in them. Teaching gives you a place even above parents: parents give life, but a teacher gives direction. Yet if a teacher fails in that duty and if he discourages or neglects a student, he can destroy that young person's confidence. That is why I always say: the teacher must come back to his role. The day he does, everything will change. No nation has ever progressed without strong teachers. A single dedicated educator can plant seeds that transform generations. When students are inspired, they learn discipline, empathy, and tolerance, and I assure you, they will not go astray but instead become active contributors to their society's progress.

BP: Any message for young people?

MY: Concentrate, stay focused, and strive to make yourself a successful person. When I speak to the youth, I tell them that true success lies in living within the values of their faith while achieving excellence that makes the world proud of them. This balance of faith and success is what defines real progress. We're now entering an era where genuine education will reward you, so become entrepreneurs, create opportunities and change not only your own destiny but also that of your people, your region and your country.



Prof. Masoom Yasinzai, QAU Vice Chancellor, signs an MoU for academic collaboration with University of Jordan President Prof. Ekhliel Al-Tarawneh.

FADING GREEN

Balochistan's land is drying, its people are relocating and a silent crisis is reshaping the province

By Saleem Shaikh



In the arid stretches of Balochistan, a slow-moving but devastating crisis is reshaping lives, landscapes and livelihoods. Once fertile rangelands and agricultural belts are steadily turning into barren wastelands. Desertification, driven by climate change, unsustainable land use, vanishing groundwater and declining rainfall, is tightening its grip, threatening food security and displacing communities.



Balochistan adopts climate-smart crops and water management.

Cracked soils

In Khuzdar district, Abdul Rehman, a farmer in his fifties, surveys what was once a thriving wheat field bordered with fruit orchards. Today, the soil is cracked and lifeless.

"We had enough to feed our families and even sell surplus produce," he recalls. "Now the soil gives us nothing. Even the rain betrays us."

Abdul's story mirrors a wider reality. The Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources reports that nearly 70 percent of Balochistan's land area is vulnerable to desertification. Erratic rainfall, recurring droughts and soaring temperatures have

accelerated land degradation, leaving little chance of recovery.

Desertification is not the expansion of existing deserts but the transformation of once-productive land into arid terrain. In Balochistan, both natural and human

drivers fuel the process. Reduced precipitation and prolonged droughts strip the soil of moisture, while overgrazing, deforestation and unsustainable cropping accelerate erosion.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation warns that Balochistan's rangelands, supporting over 90 percent of rural households through livestock, are deteriorating rapidly. Shrubs and grasses are vanishing, replaced by thorny bushes that make grazing nearly impossible.

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Balochistan's rangelands, supporting over 90 percent of rural households through livestock, are deteriorating rapidly. — UN FAO

Globally, the problem is staggering. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification estimates that over 24 billion tons of fertile soil are lost annually. About 41 percent of the Earth's land area is already degraded, affecting more than 3.2 billion people. For Pakistan, ranked among the most climate-vulnerable countries, the challenge is particularly severe.

Silent Emergency

The loss of cultivable land sets off cascading impacts. Farmers face collapsing crop yields, while pastoralists watch their animals die from lack



A family relocates from Balochistan in search of better opportunities.

of fodder and water. Entire communities slip into poverty, forcing migration. Villages in districts such as Nushki, Kharan and Chagai have seen waves of families moving to Quetta or Karachi in search of survival.

Women and children bear the harshest burden. With wells drying up, women walk for hours to fetch water. Malnutrition among children is rising as food production declines. Health experts in Quetta warn of increasing waterborne diseases as desperate families rely on unsafe sources.

Balochistan has endured recurring droughts over the past two decades, some lasting years. The Pakistan Meteorological Department notes a 2°C rise in average temperature over the last 50 years, making it one of the fastest-warming regions in the country.

These changes mean unpredictable rainfall, flash floods that strip topsoil and prolonged dry spells that parch crops. "Desertification in Balochistan is both an environmental and a human security issue," says Dr. Ghulam Rasul, former director general of the Pakistan Meteorological Department. "It undermines livelihoods, fuels migration and can even exacerbate conflict over scarce resources like water and grazing land."

Policy Lacunas and Local Solutions

Pakistan is a signatory to the UNCCD, and desertification is acknowledged in national policy. Yet implementation lags. Traditional karez (underground water channels) have dried due to neglect and falling groundwater tables. Rangelands remain overstocked with livestock beyond their ecological carrying capacity. Weak enforcement of forest laws, particularly in juniper zones, has worsened degradation. Still, there are glimmers of hope. In Mastung and Pishin, local groups



Malnutrition hits infants in Zhob as aid and healthcare fall short.

have planted drought-resistant trees and adopted rotational grazing, giving rangelands time to recover. Environmentalists stress that such community-led initiatives, if supported by state institutions, could slow desertification. "We cannot stop it completely," says Muhammad Asif Sahibzada, director general at the

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Local knowledge, rainwater harvesting and drought-resistant trees can slow desertification.

— **Muhammad Asif Sahibzada, Climate Change Ministry**



Goats and sheep grazing in open piece of rangelands in Pishin.

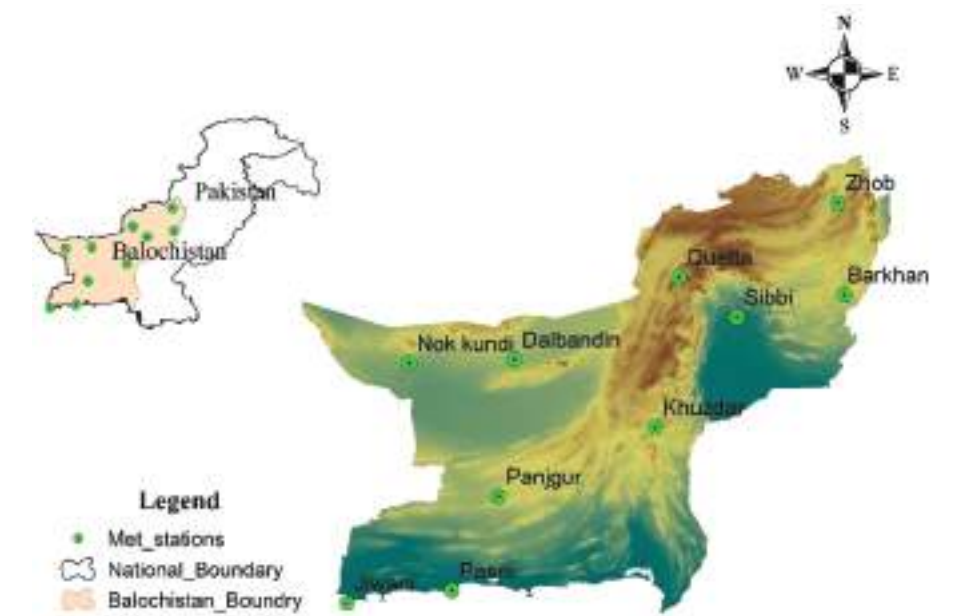
Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination in Islamabad. "But we can slow it down through local knowledge, rainwater harvesting, planting drought-tolerant trees scientific methods."

A Looming of Food Insecurity

The stakes extend far beyond Balochistan. Covering 44 percent of Pakistan's landmass, the province is vital for livestock, fruits and dryland crops. If unchecked, desertification could devastate national food security and intensify poverty and instability in an already fragile region.

According to UNCCD estimates, desertification and drought cost developing countries up to 10 percent of their annual GDP. For Pakistan, this translates into billions of dollars in lost agricultural productivity, livestock deaths and rural livelihoods.

Experts agree that reversing the trend requires unwavering national commitment. Implementation of Balochistan's climate policy and the National Climate Change Policy 2012 is critical, focusing on drought adaptation, sustainable farming and community resilience. Priority actions include groundwater recharge, protection of juniper forests, reforestation, rotational grazing and localisation of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (Life on Land).



"Failing to act," warns Asif Sahibzada, "means the deserts will keep expanding silently, swallowing livelihoods and leaving behind parched earth where fertile fields once stood."

For Balochistan, desertification is no longer a distant concern. In fact, it is a crisis unfolding now. With rainfall deficits, declining water tables and degrading land, what disappears today may be gone for generations.

The writer is climate analyst, research scholar and media trainer. He can be reached at saleemzeal@gmail.com



Children fetch water amid shortages on Quetta's outskirts.



THE SILENT EPIDEMIC

Diabetes cases are surging across the country, putting millions at risk amid low awareness

By BP Team

Diabetes is tightening its grip on Pakistan at an alarming pace. Once considered a disease of affluence and age, it now cuts across all demographics, leaving millions vulnerable and straining an already fragile healthcare system. Today, 34.5 million adults live with diabetes, while another 12–17 million are pre-diabetic. That means nearly one in three adults is already affected or at high risk.

“It’s nothing short of an epidemic,” Dr Sarwar Malik, consultant endocrinologist at the Capital Development Authority Hospital in Islamabad, told Balochistan Pulse. “Pakistan has the highest diabetes prevalence rate in the world, 31.4 percent, and if urgent steps are not taken, over 70 million people could be living with the disease by 2050.”

A Widening Net of Risk

Traditionally, diabetes was linked to older age groups, but the landscape is changing fast. People 40 and above remain the most vulnerable, yet doctors are increasingly diagnosing younger adults, even those aged 18 to 35, with Type-2 diabetes. “The early onset we are now seeing is a ticking time bomb for the future,” Dr Malik warned. Women face unique risks, especially those with a history of gestational diabetes or obesity, while urban dwellers are

more prone due to sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets. But rural areas are catching up as modern habits spread and awareness remains limited.

The crisis is made worse by a vast gap between diagnosis and treatment. Globally, many diabetics remain undiagnosed, but Pakistan fares even worse. “Almost 60 percent of patients here are either undiagnosed or not receiving proper care,” the endocrinologist explained.



Pakistan has the highest diabetes prevalence rate in the world, 31.4 percent

— **Dr Sarwar Malik, consultant endocrinologist**

Even among those on treatment, more than half fail to maintain healthy blood sugar control. The result is a surge in complications such as kidney failure, neuropathy and heart disease. High out-of-pocket costs and poor follow-up care compound the challenge. “Diabetes requires lifelong management but most patients lack the means or education to stay in control,” he said.

More Than Lifestyle

Unhealthy diets, obesity and lack of exercise are major contributors, but genetics and social factors deepen the crisis. South Asians are genetically predisposed to insulin resistance, making them more vulnerable at lower body weights and younger ages. Poverty and gender disparities leave many, especially women, unable to access proper care.

“This epidemic is not purely medical,” Dr Malik said. “It is social, economic and cultural, which means the solutions must also be multidimensional.” Community initiatives, like the Changing Diabetes in Children programme in Faisalabad or school-based health sessions, have helped raise awareness locally. But at the national level, awareness is still poor. In Punjab, only 47 percent of people surveyed had adequate knowledge of diabetes, with rural, female and low-income groups faring worst.



Dr. Sarwar Malik

“Local campaigns are encouraging but they’re not enough. We need sustained, nationwide programmes that cut across all sections of society,” the endocrinologist said.

Old Drugs, New Promises

On the treatment front, Metformin remains the affordable, first-line medication for Type-2 diabetes in Pakistan. But newer drug classes like SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 receptor agonists, including the widely discussed Ozempic (semaglutide), are gaining ground.

These modern drugs lower blood sugar, help weight loss and reduce risks of heart and kidney disease. However, their high cost puts them beyond the reach of most Pakistanis. Side effects such as nausea, digestive issues and, rarely, pancreatitis also require close supervision. “These medications are promising,” Dr Malik noted, “but affordability and safe access remain major hurdles.” Despite the promise of modern drugs, lifestyle remains central to both prevention and treatment. A diet rich in vegetables, whole

DIABETES IN NUMBERS

34.5 MILLION



ADULTS WITH DIABETES

12–17 MILLION



PRE-DIABETIC

OVER 70 MILLION



PEOPLE COULD BE LIVING WITH THE DISEASE BY 2050

grains and lean proteins helps regulate blood sugar. Regular exercise improves insulin sensitivity, while stress management prevents spikes caused by hormonal changes.

“Medicines help but without lifestyle changes, they are just a temporary fix,” the endocrinologist said.

The Way Forward

If he could push one reform, Dr Malik would focus on education. “We need widespread and sustained diabetes awareness programmes at the community

level,” he argued. Schools, workplaces and primary healthcare centres could all serve as hubs for prevention. Coupled with affordable access to nutrition counseling and exercise opportunities, such efforts could drastically reduce new cases.

“Education fuels prevention,” he noted. “And prevention is the only real key to reversing this epidemic.”

With nearly a third of its adult population at risk, Pakistan is staring down a national health emergency. The costs, including medical, social and economic, are rising each year. Without stronger awareness, accessible treatment and structural reforms, the numbers will only climb. The crisis may be daunting, but as Dr Malik emphasised, diabetes is not inevitable. With early action, Pakistan can still turn the tide against its silent epidemic.



A LIFE DEVOTED TO ART

Jamal Shah of Balochistan has influenced the country's cultural landscape through art, education and social work

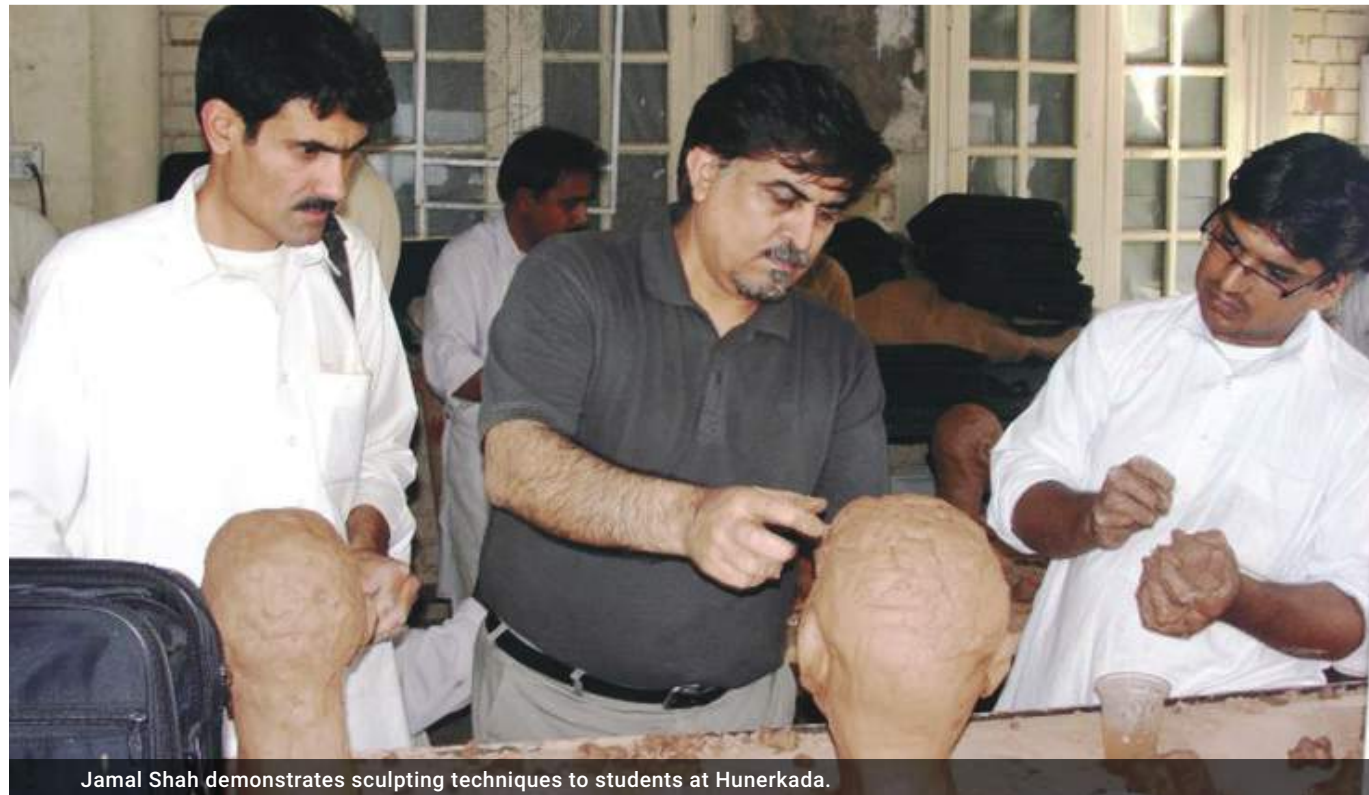
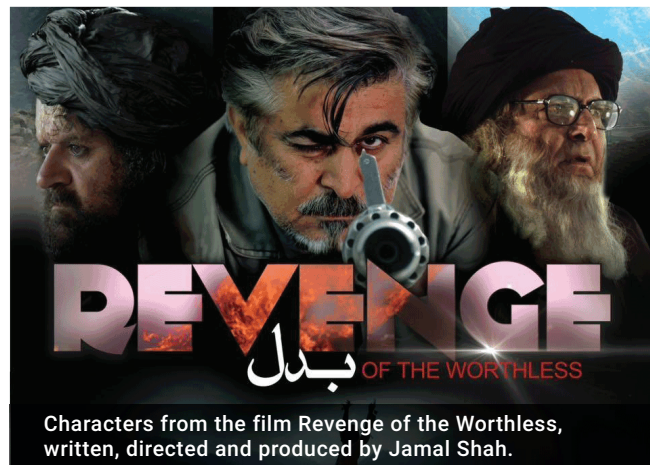
By Durdana Khan

Jamal Shah's life has always been guided by creativity. Born in Quetta, he grew up in a family that nurtured his artistic inclinations. "Each night, my mother would clean the walls covered with my day's drawings, leaving me a fresh slate for the next day," he recalls. That early encouragement allowed him to experiment freely, and it planted the seeds for a career that would span painting, sculpture, acting, directing and teaching.

Art Over Tradition

Though his family had envisioned a conventional path, medicine or public service like his father, Shah chose to follow his passion. He enrolled at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, majoring in sculpture under the guidance of his artist uncle, Aziz Jan Agha. The mentorship of Khalid Iqbal, Pakistan's celebrated landscape artist, also left an indelible mark on Shah, shaping both his artistic sensibilities and his philosophy of life.

Shah describes himself as a "drifter," moving between disciplines to explore life through creativity. Philosophy also played a role in his intellectual growth. A chance encounter with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* in Quetta challenged his worldview. "It was a struggle to read, but when I began to understand, I felt born again, ready to face life as a freer individual," he said. This early



engagement with existential thought helped Shah approach art as a means of questioning norms and reflecting society.

Impactful Acting and Filmmaking

His career in acting and movie making has been equally bold and socially conscious. Early work for PTV included music and youth programmes, but he soon ventured into drama and cinema. He starred in Ashfaq Ahmed's *Band Galli* and wrote plays such as *Kohkan*, highlighting the struggles of coal miners. Internationally, he appeared in the British TV series *Traffik* and the mountaineering film *K-2*. His most recent film, *Revenge of the Worthless*, explores the Swat insurgency of 2009, reinforcing his commitment to using art to confront difficult social issues.

Education and mentorship have been central to Shah's mission. In 1984, he founded the Fine Arts Department at the University of Balochistan. In 1991, he established Hunerkada, a visual and performing arts institution dedicated to nurturing creativity and social awareness. Programmes like the 'Face Off' camp bring students together with mentors from multiple disciplines to explore issues of intolerance and civic responsibility through art. Cities across Pakistan, including Peshawar, Quetta, Swat, Islamabad and Kohat, have hosted these camps, showcasing art as a tool for communication and social change. Shah's leadership extends to institutional roles as well. He has served as Director General of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) and currently chairs the Silk Road Culture Centre. In 2023, he briefly held the portfolio of national heritage and culture in the caretaker government, where he focused on promoting Pakistan's heritage, tourism, crafts and folk arts. In every role, Shah has emphasised the importance of accessibility, education and collaboration across art forms.



Global Acclaim

His contributions have been recognised internationally. The French government awarded him the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, honouring his lifelong dedication to art, culture and heritage. Ambassador Nicolas Galey lauded Shah's ability to merge tradition with innovation, teaching with practice and local identity with global engagement. "From art exhibitions to festivals and concerts, you have maintained and strengthened the diversity of partners, art forms, mediums and themes that have characterised your career of more than 45 years," he said. For Shah, the award reflects a career committed to building bridges, between communities, between art forms and between countries.

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Art is for life, and life gives meaning to art

— Jamal Shah

Shah sees art and life as inseparable.

"Art is for life, and life gives meaning to art," he says. From sculpture to painting, from acting to directing and from teaching to mentoring, he demonstrates that creativity can inspire, heal and transform. In a country where cultural institutions often face political and bureaucratic challenges, Shah remains a guiding figure, showing that art can be a force for resilience, reflection and social engagement.

As Pakistan continues to navigate cultural and social complexities, Jamal Shah's work reminds us that creativity is not merely a profession; it is a way to understand and shape the world. His journey embodies the idea that art, at its best, is both a personal pursuit and a public mission, connecting generations, transcending boundaries and enriching society.



FROM PAIN TO HOPE:

MY VISION FOR BALOCHISTAN'S PEACE AND PROSPERITY

A roadmap for peace and prosperity, Dr. Abdul Rehman Khan's vision for a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Balochistan.

By: Dr. Abdul Rehman Khan

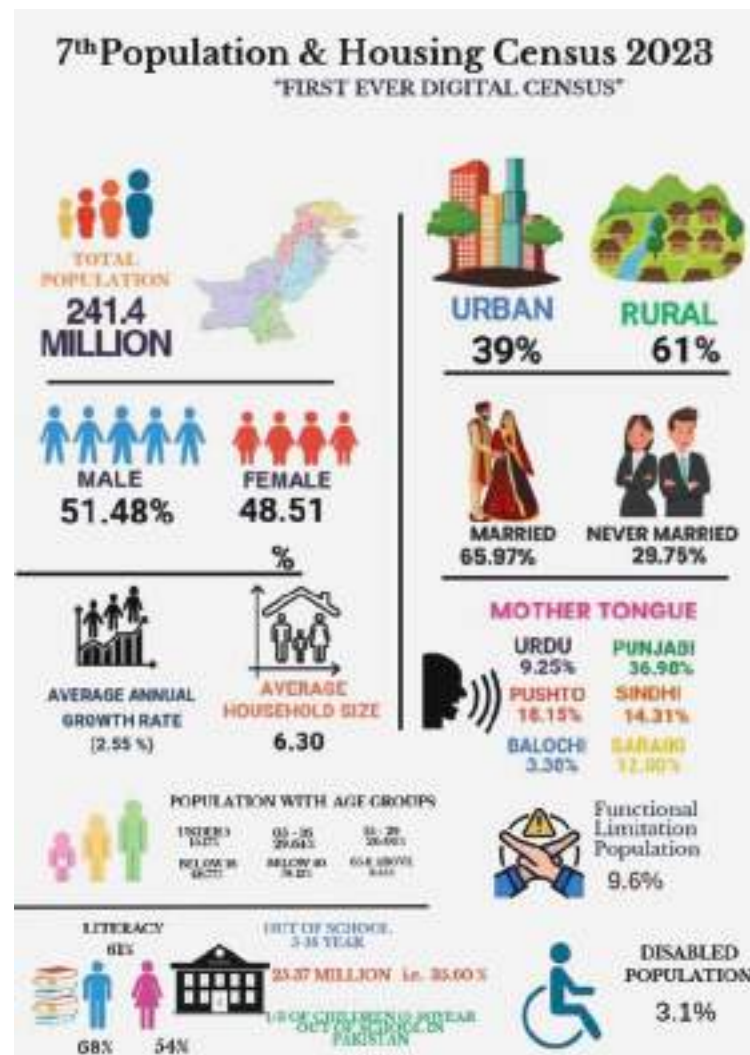
I still remember the day my grandmother, sitting under the scorching sun in our home, told me stories of abundance that once defined our land. She spoke of water channels that flowed freely, of fields that were green, the air that was fresh and soothing, the love and care among the neighbours for each other, and of a time when young people did not have to leave home to find work.

That was decades ago. Today, as I write this from the comfort of an air-conditioned home, her weathered face haunts me—not because she's gone, but because the Balochistan she described feels like a distant dream for me and the coming generation.

I worked with the government and non-government sector for over a decade in the 1990s and early 2000's, then I went for my higher education and was there for around 15 years. As a son of this soil, I decided to return to Balochistan to serve my people.

I have watched our province suffering for too long. I have seen my childhood friends and college fellows leaving the country, not out of hatred, but out of desperation. I have witnessed brilliant young women in Gwadar, Turbat, Zhib and Loralai abandon their studies because their families could not afford to send them to school. Let us be honest about where we are. In 2025, Balochistan remains Pakistan's most underdeveloped province despite being its largest

and most resource-rich. The total literacy rate sits at just 42%, and for women, it is an appalling 36.8%. While the rest of Pakistan has moved forward, we have been left behind, watching our children die at rates that shame us as a civilized society. Sixteen out of every 100 children in Balochistan do not live to see their fifth birthday, compared to 10 in the rest of Pakistan. The people of Balochistan continue to live in poverty that would shock most Pakistanis. Around 70% of



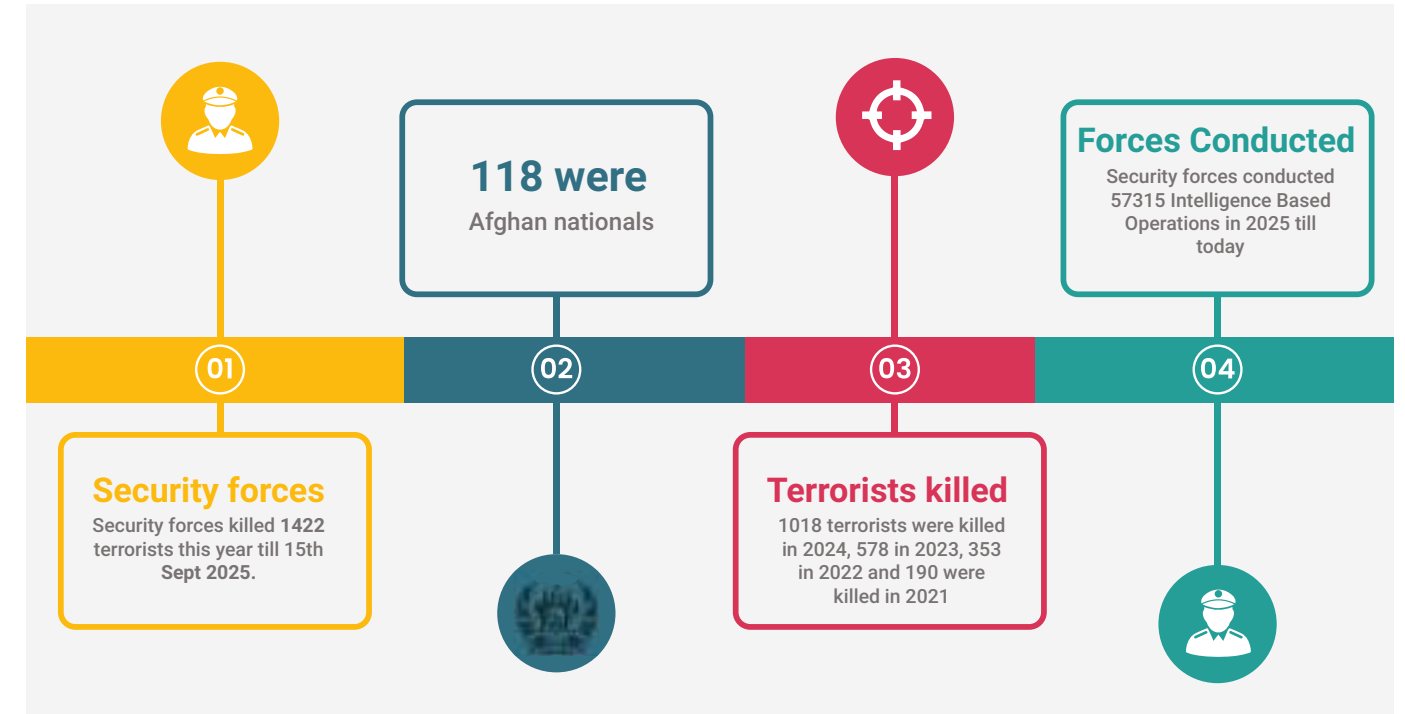
Pakistan must adopt a comprehensive National Climate Security Policy, recognizing climate change as a multiplier of conflict and displacement.





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Mapping climate-conflict hotspots is as vital as monitoring militancy.

Balochistan’s population survives below the poverty line. This disparity has created resentment and fueled negative sentiments, particularly among the deprived communities who feel doubly marginalized. The ongoing terrorism since 2003 has crippled Balochistan’s development. Every attack, every death, every act of violence pushes us further away from the development we desperately need. I refuse to accept that this is our destiny. Here, I present not just a policy framework, but a roadmap extracted from years of research, countless conversations with communities across the province, and an unwavering belief that Balochistan can transform from a symbol of neglect to a model of inclusive development. This comprehensive six-pillared framework represents collaborative work with development experts, economists, social scientists, and youth committed to transforming Balochistan’s development trajectory.



Pillar One: Taking Communities Seriously

For too long, development in Balochistan has been imposed through the wishes of individuals, without asking the people what they actually need. This must change.

We need to establish Community Development Councils in every district – not as showpieces, but as real decision-making bodies where local people control at least 50% of development spending. Imagine if the people of Dera Bugti could decide how to spend development funds from gas royalties. Imagine if women in Khuzdar could vote on whether their district needs a hospital or a school first. Think when the youth of Ziarat are able how to prioritize safe-guarding their juniper forest.

When people have a stake in their own development, they protect it instead of destroying it. We must ensure equal representation throughout Balochistan in all major decision-making bodies. The provincial government has historically favored one region over the other, feeling abandoned. This geographic balance is crucial for building trust across the province.

Pillar Two: Investing in Our Greatest Asset – Our People

The biggest tragedy in Balochistan may not be poverty

alone; it is the wasted human potential. Balochistan has over 2 million children out of school while sitting on resources worth billions. We need to declare a “Balochistan Education Emergency” targeting 500,000 out-of-school children within three years.

This means more schools for far-flung communities, improved facilities, safe transportation for girls, and trained teachers who are respected, well-compensated, and motivated. Healthcare must also be transformed. Mobile health units, equipped with internet, immunization toolkits, and telemedicine, must reach every corner of the province. Every woman in Panjgur should be able to consult a specialist in Quetta. We need to train community health workers—at least one per 800 people—and target child malnutrition

through feeding programs to overcome stunting and wasting.

Pillar Three: Creating Real Economic Opportunities

Economic development in Balochistan has meant one thing for too long: extraction without inclusion. The government must create economic zones in each division that add value to local resources before export. Through CPEC, we must ensure that at least 50% of jobs go to locals and that local businesses get preference. We need “Balochistan First” policies to ensure people benefit from projects in their homeland.

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Climate change diplomacy must shift from competition to cooperative resilience across South Asia.

Women's economic participation is crucial — establishing 500 Women's Economic Collectives and Women's Business Incubation Centers in all districts can transform communities. Similarly, a Rs. 10 billion Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Fund should provide interest-free loans, while IT Parks in each division can help youth work remotely instead of migrating abroad.

Pillar Four: Building Bridges Instead of Walls

Real peace requires addressing grievances. The non-kinetic approach of our armed forces has shown results, but more is needed. We must establish a Provincial High-Level Commission to listen, facilitate dialogue, and provide a way forward — and Community Peace Committees in every district to prevent local disputes from escalating. When a 20-year-old in Dera Bugti or Kharan has skills, a job, and a voice in governance, he is far less likely to pick up a gun.

Pillar Five: Protecting Our Environment and Resources

Climate change hits Balochistan hardest. Our

groundwater is disappearing, agriculture is failing, and disasters are worsening. We need a Climate Adaptation Fund, district-level early warning systems, and strong water management programs treating water as the scarce resource it is. Every mining project must have a mandatory local development share directly benefiting affected communities.

Pillar Six: Making Government Work for People

Balochistan's biggest challenge is governance. Corruption and inefficiency cripple progress. We need transparent digital platforms where citizens can track public spending, and performance-based budgeting that rewards results. Local governments must be strengthened with real powers and resources closer to communities. A proposed Balochistan Peace and Development Authority (BPDA) can oversee implementation — autonomous, inclusive, and accountable, with regional offices across the province.

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Financial protection through climate insurance is not welfare — it's resilience.

This authority would operate in three phases:

- Phase One: Quick wins through emergency



- interventions
- Phase Two: Scaling up successful programs
- Phase Three: Sustaining long-term reforms

This framework is not just about solving today's crises but preparing for tomorrow's. By 2030, Balochistan's population will rise by 3–4 million, and climate stress will deepen.

Investing now in climate-resilient infrastructure, diversified economy, and social cohesion will secure the province's future.

The framework's cost — Rs. 300 to 400 billion over five years — is achievable and far less than the cost of continued conflict.

This plan needs attention at the highest levels — from Pakistan's Prime Minister and Chief Minister of Balochistan to federal ministers and international partners.

A High-Level Steering Committee must secure commitments, coordinate resources, and ensure accountability.

As I conclude, I think of my grandmother's stories — of abundance, peace, and community. I think of my friends who left out of despair, and of the young girls who could

become doctors or teachers if given the chance. We must give them hope. This framework is not just a policy proposal — it is a promise that peace is possible when justice becomes real. A satisfied and empowered youth will never again fall into the hands of those who wish to destabilize Pakistan. The window for transformation is narrowing — but it is not yet shut.

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Water is now Balochistan's frontline security issue — not just a resource crisis.

For our children, for our dignity, and for our homeland — let us choose hope over despair, development over destruction, inclusion over marginalization. Let us prove that Balochistan can light the way forward for Pakistan — and for the world.

Dr. Abdul Rehman Khan, is a development expert and researcher specializing in post-conflict reconstruction and inclusive governance. As a native of Balochistan, he has spent over a decade studying development challenges in conflict-affected regions and has contributed to policy frameworks at multiple forums.

A VOICE FROM THE MOUNTAINS

Young singer Urooj Fatima from Balochistan shares her journey, inspirations and dreams

By BP Team



In Balochistan's rugged landscape, where tradition runs deep, a young voice is rising. Urooj Fatima is winning hearts with her soulful, multilingual musical performances. From school stages to international platforms, she has carried only passion, her guitar and her family's support. Famed for her Balochi duet "Laila O Laila" with popular singer Ali Zafar, Fatima is not just making music; she is carrying the spirit of Balochistan and the promise of its young women to the world. Fatima shares her path and ambitions with Balochistan Pulse.

BP: You sing in many different languages, which is unusual for a young artist. How many do you perform in and what draws you to them?

UF: I sing in Brahvi, Balochi, Urdu, Pashto and Persian, and sometimes even Spanish, Turkish and English. Language has never been a barrier; each one connects me to people in its own way.

BP: Your identity is deeply rooted in Balochistan. How does your background shape your music?

UF: I'm from Balochistan and my mother tongue is Brahvi. The culture, the mountains and the traditions of my land influence



everything I do. But I also embrace diversity in music because I believe it brings people closer.

BP: Tell us about the beginning of your musical journey. How did you first step onto the stage?

UF: It started in school, where I performed at events and NGO programmes. Those small stages gave me confidence. Later, I had the



chance to collaborate with Ali Zafar. Singing alongside him was unforgettable; people loved our song and it gave me the courage to move forward.

BP: Was it difficult to take music seriously in a place where opportunities are limited?

UF: Honestly, it wasn't. When you sing from the heart, for God, for people, it flows naturally. I practiced guitar at home, taught myself and slowly added piano and other instruments. My brother, who also plays guitar, has been my constant companion and support on this journey.

BP: What kind of music inspires you the most and what do you enjoy performing?

UF: Traditional Balochi and Persian songs inspire me deeply; they connect me to my roots. But I also love experimenting, blending languages and genres. It keeps my performances fresh and exciting.

BP: Outside of music, do you have other passions or hobbies?

UF: I love food and cooking! My family is really good at it. I'm more focused on music than the kitchen, but I enjoy exploring new flavours whenever I can.

BP: You've performed on many stages now. Which experiences stand out the most?

UF: I've performed across Balochistan and Pakistan, and internationally in places like Dubai. Each stage has taught me something new. Every performance feels like a new chapter in my



journey.

BP: What would you say to young artists from Balochistan, especially women who may hesitate to step forward?

UF: I'd tell them to promote their culture and language proudly. Don't be afraid of stepping into the spotlight. I feel so happy when I see young women from Balochistan showcasing their talent. If you believe in yourself, your family will support you.

BP: You've already been recognised with awards, both at home and abroad. What do they mean to you?

UF: I was honoured to receive the Excellence Award and other awards, including from the US. Each award is a reminder that hard work and passion never go unnoticed. They keep me motivated.

BP: Finally, how do you define music and what role does it play in your life?

UF: For me, music is life. It's like a caravan moving toward its destination, carrying our stories, emotions and dreams. I'm grateful to be part of that journey.



A SIP OF TRADITION

Green tea brings people in Balochistan together through warmth and shared culture

By Shabana Tareen

In the mountains of Balochistan, where the air is dry and evenings grow cool, a simple cup of green tea is more than just a drink. It is a tradition, a way of life and a symbol of hospitality. Across the rugged valleys and along old caravan routes, green tea has found its place in every home and gathering. From Quetta to remote villages hidden in the hills, people serve it to guests before any words of business or friendship are spoken.

A Cup of Welcome

When you enter a home, the first thing you are offered is not food, but a steaming glass of green tea. It comes in small, delicate cups, often with sugar cubes or sometimes plain. In many households, the tea is brewed slowly in

shining kettles, filling the room with a soft, earthy aroma. For the hosts, serving tea is a mark of respect; for the guests, accepting it is a gesture of trust. "If there is no green tea, the gathering feels incomplete," says Abdul Wahid, a shopkeeper in Quetta's Kandhari Bazaar. In Quetta's old bazaars, tea shops glow with samovars. Men sit on wooden benches, sipping cup after cup while



discussing politics, poetry and the price of livestock. In villages, shepherds prepare tea over open fires, the smoke of burning wood blending with the steam from the kettle. Green tea travels with the people. Traders carry it on caravans, students sip it late at night while studying and travellers find comfort in it at roadside inns.

A Link with the Past

Balochistan's tea culture is deeply tied to history. For centuries, traders from China, Central Asia and Afghanistan passed through these lands. Along with silk and spices, they brought tea. Over time, green tea became part of the local identity. Unlike the milk tea common in Punjab and Sindh, Balochistan's love has remained for the lighter, refreshing green.

Today, Quetta has modern tea cafés where young people meet, share stories and connect over Wi-Fi. Yet green tea still holds its place. It cuts across age and class; shepherds in Chagai, shopkeepers in Pishin and university students in Quetta all enjoy the same flavour. "It keeps the mind awake and the body light," laughs Hina, a college student. "You can drink it all day and it never feels heavy."

More than a Drink

Green tea in Balochistan is not about luxury. It is about simplicity, warmth and togetherness. It is a pause in the busy rhythm of life, a reason to sit, talk and share a quiet



bond between host and guest. As the evening sun falls on the brown hills, families gather on carpets spread across courtyards. Conversations drift, laughter rises and the kettle is refilled again and again. For Balochistan, green tea is more than hot water and leaves; it is memory, culture and the taste of belonging.



ZIARAT'S HIDDEN GEM

Chakor Tangi gorge offers serenity, cool waters and stunning views

By Helmand Khan

The first time I heard the name Chakor Tangi, it felt like a rumour, not a real place. My friend in Quetta insisted: "It's a gorge near Ziarat. Cliffs, cool water and silence you can practically touch." Ziarat is already famous for its old juniper trees and the Quaid's Residency, but the idea of a hidden gorge, tucked between towering rocks, was too good to ignore. A week later, I was driving, chasing that mystery.

Chasing the Whisper

We left the noise of the Ziarat bazaar, the smell of parathas and hot tea, behind as the road quickly headed into the mountains. Dusty slopes rose high on both sides, sprinkled with tough juniper and pistachio trees. Every curve felt like a postcard of Balochistan's rugged beauty: huge skies, red rocks and goats climbing impossible slopes. After about 15 kilometres, the road narrowed. A small track branched off and suddenly, the world closed in. Two massive walls of rock stood close together, guarding their secret. This was it: the entrance to Chakor Tangi. Step inside and everything changes. The sun struggles to get through, the temperature immediately drops, and the noise of the outside world disappears. All you hear is the light scrape of your shoes on stone, the steady trickle of water and maybe a bird taking sudden flight. Water is the boss here. For centuries,

rain and hidden springs have carved this narrow, twisting path. Clear pools reflect slivers of the sky. The rock faces are smooth in some places, sharp and angular in others, a natural art gallery shaped over millions of years.

A Local Favourite

Though it feels deeply hidden, Chakor Tangi is well loved. Families from Ziarat and Quetta come for picnics. Students laugh and take photos for Instagram. Motorcyclists park their bikes and walk in, seeking a moment of peace. I met local teenagers drinking tea on a big, smooth rock. "It's the coolest place around," one told me. "When exams finish, we bring a small speaker, play music and stay until it gets dark."

The best part? It hasn't been ruined by big tourism. There are no hotels, no huge signs. By sunset, everyone is gone and the gorge sinks back into total silence.

Humans do leave their mark. Plastic bottles float in the pools, snack wrappers lie in corners and names are scratched into rocks, as if people need to prove they were here on something already older than history. Local elders always tell visitors: "Take your rubbish home. Leave only your footsteps."

This gorge, like the juniper forests, is part of the land's identity. Losing it to litter would be a deep shame.



Simple Advice

When to visit: Summer afternoons are ideal; it's hot outside but perfectly cool inside the gorge. The late afternoon light makes the cliffs glow gold, perfect for photos.

What to know: Wear tough, non-slip shoes; the rocks can be tricky. Bring your own water. And the rule is simple: don't litter. If you can find a local to guide you, they'll show hidden springs and wild herbs the ancient way.

Chakor Tangi is a quiet place that asks for only one thing: respect. Show up, listen to the silence, and leave gently. The gorge will handle the rest.



BALUCHISTAN PULSE

