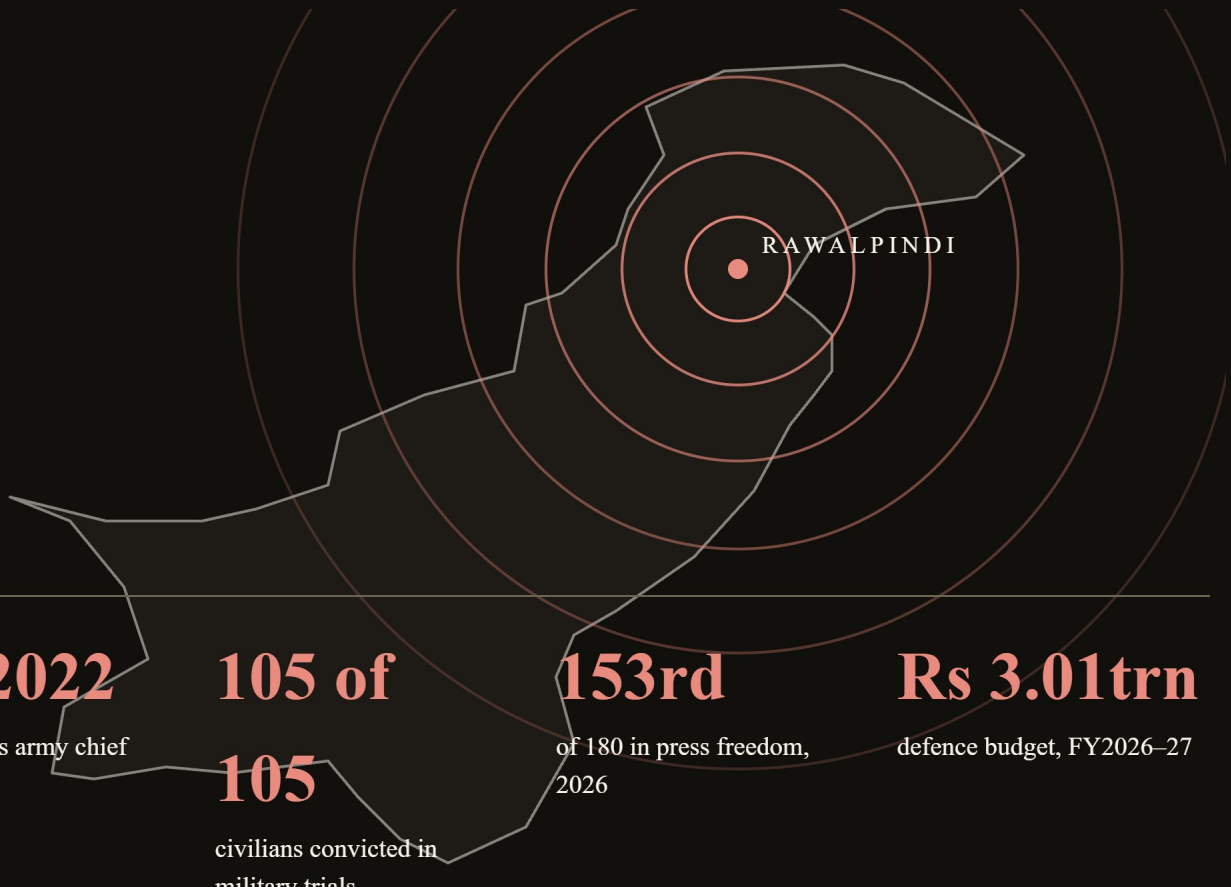
THE BUSINESS OF *NARRATIVE*

The army's media wing since Asim Munir took command: more power, more airtime, more money, and no budget line.



Nov 2022
Munir becomes army chief

105 of 105
civilians convicted in military trials

153rd
of 180 in press freedom, 2026

Rs 3.01trn
defence budget, FY2026–27

Sources: ICJ; Reporters Without Borders; Business Recorder, 13 June 2026; Arab News.

02 · THE VERDICT

Four years of Munir: a louder ISPR, a bigger budget, no accountability

Since November 2022 the army's press office has stopped merely announcing. It accuses, sentences, labels and spends.

1. **It became a political weapon.** On 5 December 2025 the DG ISPR gave a two-hour press conference calling a jailed former prime minister "mentally ill" and a "national security threat."
2. **It is the public record of military justice.** ISPR press releases were the main public information on trials of civilians over 9 May. All 105 civilians tried were convicted.
3. **It renamed criticism terrorism.** The DG ISPR called social-media dissent "digital terrorism." Authorities registered about 689 PECA cases in eight months of 2025.
4. **It polices the press.** RSF ranks Pakistan 153rd of 180 and says journalists who cross ISPR's lines risk surveillance and abduction.
5. **Its chief is now above the law.** The 27th Amendment made Munir Chief of Defence Forces with lifetime immunity and a term running to 2030.
6. **The money keeps climbing.** Defence went from Rs1.56 trillion in FY2022–23 to Rs3.01 trillion in FY2026–27. In January 2025 ISPR-related upgrades got Rs1.945bn, with Rs1.6bn a year more requested.
7. **Still no budget line for ISPR.** The auditors' older questions about its spending were never answered.

BOTTOM LINE

The press office of an army with lifetime immunity, a trillion-rupee budget and a podium it uses against its critics.

Sources on the final page.

03 · TIMELINE

Four years, one direction

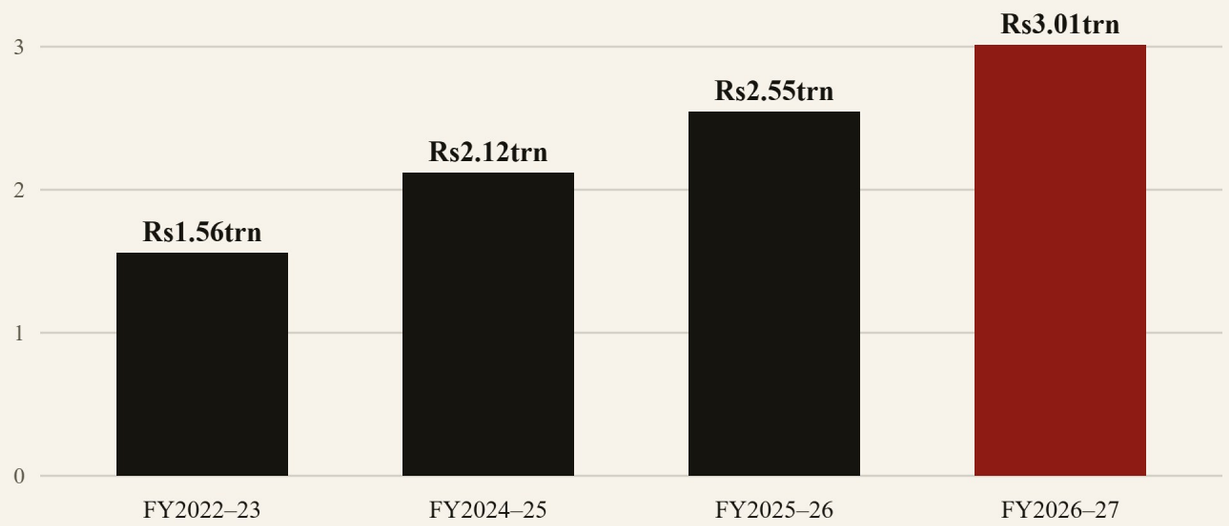
Nov 2022	Asim Munir becomes army chief. On 6 December Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry takes over as DG ISPR.
9–15 May 2023	Riots follow Imran Khan’s arrest. On 15 May distribution of Dawn is blocked after an interview that reportedly displeased the military (RSF).
Nov 2024	Parliament extends service chiefs’ terms from three to five years.
20 Dec 2024	Islamabad High Court suspends the order requiring ISPR clearance for TV defence analysts.
21 and 26 Dec 2024	ISPR announces sentences for 25, then 60 more civilians, from military courts.
2 Jan 2025	ISPR announces 19 mercy petitions accepted, out of 67 filed.
6 Jan 2025	ECC approves Rs1.945bn for ISPR-related technology and cyber security.
Jan 2025	PECA amendments penalising “false information” pass; journalists protest nationwide.
2025	Munir is promoted Field Marshal.
13 Nov 2025	Parliament passes the 27th Amendment: Chief of Defence Forces, lifetime immunity.
4–5 Dec 2025	Munir becomes the first CDF. The next day the DG ISPR holds his two-hour press conference on Imran Khan.
Jun–Aug 2026	Defence budget rises to Rs3.01trn. The Defence Forces Act 2026 passes in August.

Sources: Arab News; Dawn; ICJ; Pakistan Today; Express Tribune; Geo; Chatham House; RSF.

04 · THE MONEY

The defence budget has nearly doubled since Munir took command

Budgeted defence spending, Rs trillion, selected years.



MEASURE	FIGURE
Rise, FY2022–23 to FY2026–27	**about 93%**
FY2026–27 increase over last year’s budget	17.7%
Army allocation, FY2025–26 to FY2026–27	Rs1.184trn to Rs1.284trn
Share of federal budget, FY2026–27	nearly 16%

THE CATCH

The grant reaches the Army and the other services as a single line. Nobody outside GHQ can say what ISPR gets out of it.

Defence services allocation; military pensions are accounted for separately. Sources: Business Recorder, 13 Jun 2026; Profit, 12 Jun 2026; ARY, 12 Jun 2026; Daily Pakistan, 13 Jun 2026; Audit Report on Defence Services (FY2022–23 allocation).

05 · THE PODIUM

When the army’s spokesman does politics



Four years of press conferences

Under DG Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, press conferences have carried verdicts, labels and political attacks. On 5 December 2025 a serving general’s spokesman spoke for over two hours about a jailed former prime minister, called him a “mental patient” and demanded “an end” to PTI’s politics. A month later, opening another briefing, he welcomed the Chief of Defence Forces appointment and said its headquarters had begun work.

In 2024 he called criticism of the army “digital terrorism” and complained the law was not taking its course. Dawn noted Pakistan has no law on “digital terrorism” as such.

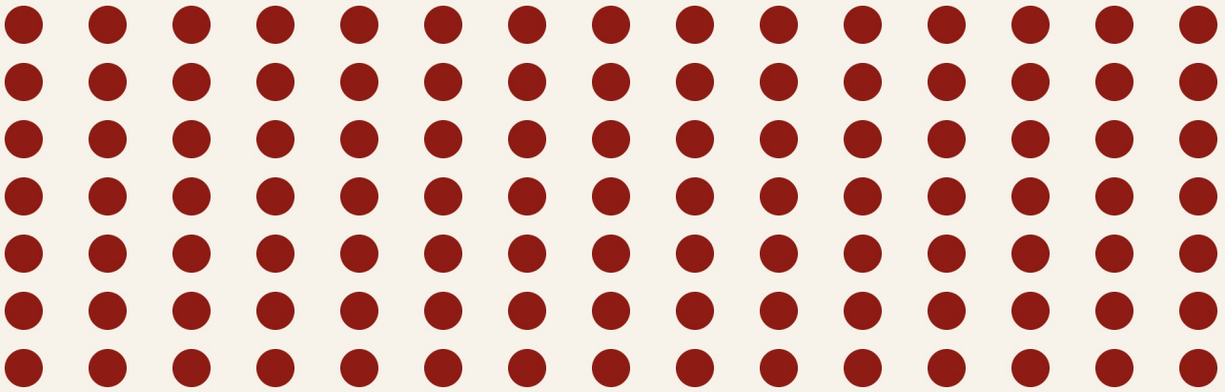
THE QUESTION

Who authorised the military’s media wing to fight politics, and who pays for it?

Sources: Dawn, 5 Dec 2025 (dawn.com/news/1959328); Geo, 5 Dec 2025; Daily Pakistan, 6 Jan 2026; Dawn (dawn.com/news/1850240).

06 · MILITARY JUSTICE

105 civilians tried. 105 convicted.



Each dot is one civilian tried by military courts over the 9–10 May events. Source: ICJ, May 2025.

- **ISPR was the record.** The ICJ found the main public information on the trials was ISPR's press releases. The ICJ said it was unclear how the conduct of those convicted fell under the offences charged.
- **Dec 2024:** ISPR announced sentences of two to ten years for 25 civilians, then 60 more days later. It said the trials were "concluded."
- **Jan 2025:** ISPR said 19 mercy petitions were accepted, out of 67 filed, on "humanitarian grounds."
- **Abroad:** the EU, UK and US criticised the trials as inconsistent with democratic norms.
- **May 2025:** the Supreme Court allowed military courts to try civilians accused over May 9 (HRW).

THE PRESS OFFICE AS COURT REPORTER

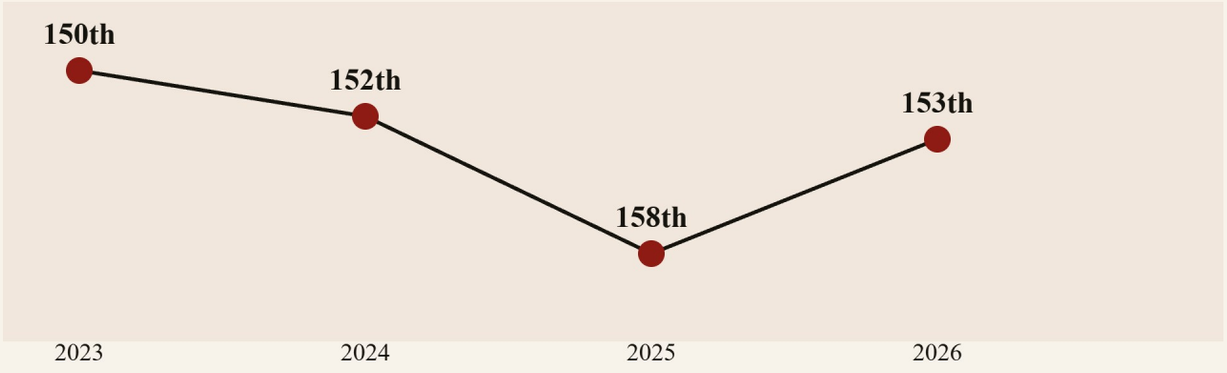
A hundred per cent conviction rate, announced by the institution that was attacked and tried the case.

Sources: ICJ, Military "Justice" in Pakistan (icj.org); Dawn, 21 and 26 Dec 2024; Pakistan Today, 3 Jan 2025; HRW World Report 2026.

07 · THE PRESS

A press that knows where ISPR’s line is

Reporters Without Borders ranking, out of 180 (lower is worse).



Shaded zone: the “very serious” category. Pakistan has not left it in five cycles.

- **RSF:** any journalist who crosses the lines dictated by ISPR, especially around elections, risks surveillance that can lead to abduction.
- **May 2023:** Dawn’s distribution was blocked after an interview that reportedly displeased the military.
- **HRW:** about 689 cases were registered under PECA between January and August 2025, many against journalists.
- **Amnesty 2026:** journalists Asad Toor and Sohrab Barkat were barred from leaving Pakistan; Barkat was later charged under PECA.
- **HRCP, May 2026:** a “severe contraction of civic space” in 2025.

THE PATTERN

The rank moved up five places in 2026. The conditions moved the other way: more prosecutions, more labels, fewer places to say the army is wrong.

Sources: RSF Pakistan page and Index 2026; Dawn, 3 May 2024; Journalism Pakistan; HRW World Report 2026; Amnesty via Dawn, June 2026; HRCP press release, 4 May 2026.

From a label to a law to an agency

The sequence, as it happened.

THE LABEL
2024
"Digital terrorism," says the DG ISPR of online critics

›

THE LAW
Jan 2025
PECA amendments penalise "false information"

›

THE MONEY
Jan 2025
Rs723m for cyber security in the ISPR grant

›

THE CASES
2025
About 689 PECA cases in eight months

›

THE UNITS
Oct 2026
NCCIA units against "anti-state propaganda" in all regions

- **2024:** the DG ISPR called criticism of the army "digital terrorism" and said the law was not taking its course. Dawn noted that Pakistan has no law on "digital terrorism" as such.
- **Jan 2025:** PECA amendments introduced penalties for spreading "false information." Journalists protested nationwide. In the same month the ECC approved Rs1.945bn for ISPR-related upgrades, including Rs723m for cyber security.
- **2025:** HRW counted about 689 PECA cases between January and August, many against journalists. HRCP found PECA, sedition and anti-terror laws widely used against journalists, political workers, rights activists and lawyers.
- **4 Oct 2026:** the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency announced special units across all regions against "fake news" and "anti-state propaganda," with a "zero-tolerance policy." The government denies it targets dissent.

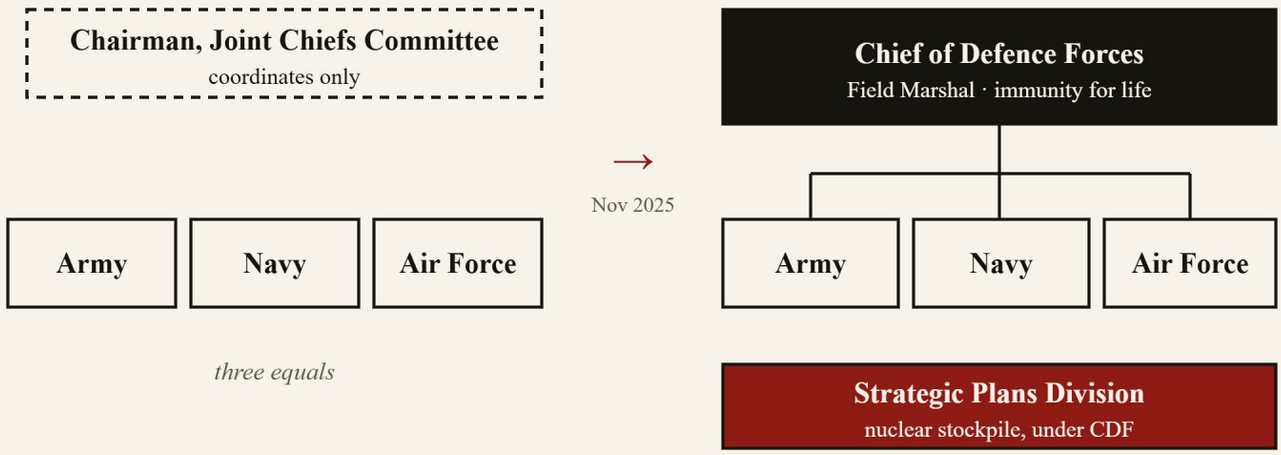
THE QUESTION

Label, law, money, cases, units. Each step is documented. How they connect is what ISPR has to explain.

Sources: Dawn (dawn.com/news/1850240); Wikipedia and Dawn on PECA 2025; Express Tribune, 7 Jan 2025; HRW World Report 2026; HRCP, 4 May 2026; Arab News, 4 Oct 2026.

09 · THE COMMAND

From three chiefs to one, with immunity



- **13 Nov 2025:** the 27th Amendment passed. The army chief became Chief of Defence Forces, with primacy over the navy and air force and command of the Strategic Plans Division.
- **Immunity:** lifetime protection from criminal proceedings for the Field Marshal, a rank only Munir holds.
- **Term:** reset to five years as CDF, to 2030, eight years in all. Removal needs a two-thirds majority; an elected prime minister can go by a simple one.
- **Courts:** the amendment bars them from questioning any constitutional change "on any ground whatsoever," and creates a Federal Constitutional Court.
- **Aug 2026:** the Defence Forces Act 2026 passed to implement the new structure.
- **HRCP:** lifetime immunity has "concentrated unchecked power in the hands of a few."

WHERE ISPR COMES IN

The press wing announced the appointment, applauded it, and now speaks for a chief who cannot be prosecuted and who will be in office for the 2029 election.

Sources: Arab News; AFP via Malay Mail, 13 Nov 2025; Chatham House, Dec 2025; JURIST, Nov 2025; Dawn (HRCP), Nov 2025; Daily Pakistan, 6 Jan 2026.

10 · THE GRANT

Rs1.945 billion, explained in two lines

On 6 January 2025 the Economic Coordination Committee approved a technical supplementary grant for the Defence Ministry after being told ISPR plays a key role in countering fake information and needs a technology upgrade.



- The public got two line items: “technology” and “cyber security.” It was not told what the systems do, who runs them or who audits them.
- The grant arrives as part of a defence budget that has risen to Rs3.01 trillion.
- In June 2026 the Auditor-General’s report on Defence Services gave an otherwise clean opinion, but repeated concern about unreconciled military bank accounts. A clean opinion certifies the books. It does not explain the purpose.

THE COMPARISON THAT MATTERS

Rs75 million for printing was enough to draw the auditors’ fire years ago. Rs1.945 billion for “technology” and “cyber security” got a nod and a press line.

Sources: Express Tribune, 7 Jan 2025 (tribune.com.pk/story/2520464); Profit, 25 Jun 2026; Business Recorder, 13 Jun 2026.

11 · BACKGROUND

Before Munir: the file nobody closed

One page of history. The auditors' questions below predate Munir and have never been publicly answered.

ITEM	AMOUNT (RS)	AUDITORS' POINT
2018 election funds	25M	Allocation letter, vouchers and ISPR's election role not produced
Hilal and calendars	75M	Special fund used; three quotations; not in stock ledger
Printing rates	43.968M	Printing Corporation not approached; cheaper printer existed
2015 visit media hire	54.494M	One vendor, three quotations; four documentaries billed for one shown
Alleged double payment	49.7M	Paid twice for one film or song; refund asked

Items overlap; do not add. Sources: Auditor-General of Pakistan, Defence Services reports 2019–20 and 2021–22.

- ISPR's replies were secrecy and authority. The Departmental Accounts Committee told it to regularise the printing and visit spending in July 2020.
- The same contractor, Sufian & Brothers, appears in all four vendor items.
- Facebook removed a 2019 network of 103 pages and accounts it linked to ISPR employees, and a 2021 network tied to AlphaPro, a PR firm Graphika linked to ISPR.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

This is the habit Munir's ISPR inherited and expanded: spend first, explain never.

Sources: AGP audit reports; Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2021; Graphika, 3 Jun 2021.

Every headline claim, and where it comes from

CLAIM	SOURCE	TYPE AND CAVEAT
Munir became army chief in Nov 2022	Arab News, Nov 2025	Press
Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry DG ISPR since 6 Dec 2022	DG ISPR official account	Official
105 civilians tried, 105 convicted	ICJ briefing, May 2025	Legal body; count as of its paper
25 then 60 civilians sentenced, Dec 2024, announced by ISPR	Dawn, 21 and 26 Dec 2024	Press quoting ISPR
19 of 67 mercy petitions accepted	ISPR via Pakistan Today, 3 Jan 2025	Official statement
“Mentally ill,” “national security threat,” 5 Dec 2025	Dawn; Geo	Press, two outlets
RSF rank 153rd in 2026, up from 158th	RSF; Dawn	Rights group
About 689 PECA cases, Jan–Aug 2025	HRW World Report 2026	Rights group
CDF post, lifetime immunity, term to 2030	Arab News; AFP; Chatham House	Press and think tank
Defence budget Rs3.01trn, up 17.7%	Business Recorder; Profit	Budget documents; excludes pensions
Rs1.945bn ECC grant, Jan 2025	Express Tribune	Press; ~Rs2bn in other outlets
NCCIA units, 4 Oct 2026	Arab News	Press

HOW THIS REPORT IS BUILT

Each figure comes from a court, a rights body, an official statement or a named outlet. Where two outlets carry a claim, both are listed. Nothing here depends on an anonymous source.

13 · NEXT STEPS

How to force the answers

Seven routes, none of which needs ISPR's permission.

Public Accounts Committee	Ask it to take up the ISPR audit paragraphs and the Rs1.945bn grant. The Defence Ministry has complied with about one-third of its directives.
Parliament	Table written questions in the National Assembly and Senate on ISPR's budget line, headcount and the Rs1.6bn recurring request.
Auditor-General	Request audit of ISPR's spending since November 2022 and check Defence Services reports from 2022–23 onwards for ISPR paragraphs.
Right of access	File requests under the federal Right of Access to Information Act, 2017 for the ECC summary and grant schedule. A defence-exemption refusal is itself a publishable answer.
Courts	Track the Islamabad High Court case on analyst clearance and the challenges to military trials of civilians.
Right of reply	Send ISPR the seven questions in writing with a deadline, and publish the reply or the silence.
Archive	Save dated copies of every source before publishing.

THE RULE

Ask in writing. Set a date. Publish the answer, or the refusal, or the silence.

Process steps are suggestions, not legal advice; confirm filing procedures with a lawyer.

14 · THE QUESTIONS

Seven questions Pakistan is asking ISPR

From taxpayers, journalists and parliament to the Director General ISPR.

1. What did you buy with the Rs1.945 billion approved in January 2025, who audits it, and was the Rs1.6 billion a year you asked for granted?
2. What is ISPR’s budget line, headcount and media spending since November 2022? Publish it.
3. Why are your press releases the only public record of the military trials of 105 civilians, and where are the charge sheets and judgments?
4. Under which law is criticism of the army “digital terrorism,” and what do the cyber units you funded do about it?
5. Who authorised a serving general’s spokesman to hold a two-hour political press conference calling a jailed former prime minister “mentally ill”?
6. Who decides which journalists and analysts are cleared, now that the Islamabad High Court has suspended ISPR’s clearance role?
7. Did ISPR or any military office ask for the blocking of Dawn’s distribution in May 2023?

THE DEMAND

Publish the budget. Answer in writing, in public and before the Public Accounts Committee. A Field Marshal with lifetime immunity should not have a press office with a secret purse.

Sources

Military courts. ICJ, “Military ‘Justice’ in Pakistan” (May 2025), icj.org · Dawn, 21 Dec 2024 (dawn.com/news/1880141) and 26 Dec 2024 (dawn.com/news/1881338) · Pakistan Today, 3 Jan 2025 · HRW World Report 2026, Pakistan (hrw.org)

DG ISPR press conferences. Dawn, 5 Dec 2025 (dawn.com/news/1959328) · Geo, 5 Dec 2025 (geo.tv/latest/637487) · Daily Pakistan, 6 Jan 2026 · Dawn, “Not enough being done against digital terrorism” (dawn.com/news/1850240)

Power and the 27th Amendment. Arab News, Nov 2025 (arabnews.pk, “Pakistan’s army chief gets fresh five-year term…”) · AFP via Malay Mail, 13 Nov 2025 · Chatham House, Dec 2025 (chathamhouse.org) · JURIST, Nov 2025 · Dawn, HRCP statement (dawn.com/news/1956888) · Wikipedia, Chief of Defence Forces (Pakistan) for the Defence Forces Act 2026

Press freedom and rights. RSF, Pakistan country page and World Press Freedom Index 2026 (rsf.org) · Dawn, 3 May 2024 (dawn.com/news/1831202) · Journalism Pakistan, on Dawn’s blocked distribution (May 2023) · Amnesty report via Dawn, June 2026 (dawn.com/news/1993639) · HRCP, State of Human Rights in 2025 (hrcp-web.org) · Dawn, 20 Dec 2024 (dawn.com/news/1879865)

Money. Express Tribune, 7 Jan 2025 (tribune.com.pk/story/2520464) · Business Recorder, 13 Jun 2026 (brecorder.com/news/40425342) · Profit, 12 and 25 Jun 2026 · ARY News, 12 Jun 2026 · Daily Pakistan, 13 Jun 2026 · Janes, 2026

Audit background. Auditor-General of Pakistan, Audit Report on Defence Services 2019–20 (paras 2.5.2, 2.6.5) and 2021–22 (para
Action!