



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC POLICY

OVERVIEW

The week of November 12-18 brought critical developments in public policy and international relations, reflecting significant challenges and opportunities for Pakistan and the broader global community. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's impassioned call for a swift resolution to the Palestinian crisis and establishment of an independent Palestinian state during the joint Arab League and OIC summit in Riyadh highlighted the pressing need for lasting solution of Palestine issue. The hopes pinned on the incoming Trump administration to curb Israeli aggression further reflect the geopolitical complexities surrounding the issue.

The Prime Minister's assurance of foolproof security for Chinese nationals reflects an essential first step toward regaining the confidence of strategic partner China, whose cooperation is crucial for Pakistan's economy and development. Meanwhile, regional tensions continued to escalate as the outgoing U.S. President Biden, though at home showed amicability to the incoming President, authorized Ukraine to use long-range missiles against Russia, further amplifying chances of catastrophic war in the neighborhood.

On the domestic front, the alarming levels of air pollution in Punjab have created a health crisis, particularly for young children and old persons. Smog emergency and lock down were the right approaches to tackle the menace on war footing. Declining wheat prices, Passco's financial constraints, inefficiencies in wheat imports, and cotton cess collection governance gaps pose significant risks to food security, necessitating price support programs and strengthened regulatory mechanisms to stabilize agriculture and meet the needs of Pakistan's growing population. The government also grappled with the menace of unbridled social media and toyed with different ideas to regulate it.

These enormous and multi-pronged challenges, as faced during the period under review, demand astute policies and smart strategies based on a vision of the future that sees opportunities amid dangers.

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PM Urges Swift Action to Establish Palestinian State

Expressing regret over the international community's "deafening silence" on the systematic genocide of the Palestinian people, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, at the joint Arab League and OIC summit in Riyadh, called for immediate action to safeguard the inalienable rights of the oppressed Palestinians. He emphasized the urgency of ensuring the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman also strongly condemned the Israeli actions in Gaza, describing them as genocide. He demanded an immediate halt to the aggression against "our brothers in Palestine and Lebanon" and urged Israel to respect Iran's sovereignty and refrain from attacking Iranian soil. This call underscored the warming ties between Middle Eastern rivals, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. The summit outlined several urgent demands, like, an immediate and unconditional ceasefire; imposing an arms embargo on Israel; lifting the Israeli blockade on Gaza to ensure the supply of food, water, electricity, and humanitarian aid.

Analysis

At this pivotal OIC summit, leaders called for Israel's withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories as a critical prerequisite for achieving regional peace. The closing statement highlighted that "a just and comprehensive peace in the region cannot be achieved without ending Israeli disruptions." PM Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast commitment to the creation of an independent, viable, and contiguous Palestinian state with Al-Quds Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders. It was a brave, bold and correct statement by the PM.

More collaboration among the Muslim countries is required as the situation in the region has worsened, with Israel now targeting Lebanon and Iran. The UN published a report noting that more than 43,500 people have been killed in Israel's war on Gaza, with a considerable proportion being women and children. After hopeless and partisan approach of Biden administration, there are growing hopes that the incoming U.S. administration under President Trump might take decisive action to curb Israel's operations in the Middle East.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Advocacy for Palestinian Independence:** Pakistan must persistently advocate for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state at every international forum.
- **Unite Muslim Nations:** Collaborate with other Muslim countries to demonstrate solidarity on the Palestinian issue.
- **Engage in Diplomatic Efforts:** Build alliances with other diplomatic offices and international authorities to highlight the Israeli barbarities and the urgent need for global action.

U.S. Climate Action won't end with Trump, COP29 Told

At COP29 in Baku, U.S. climate envoy John Podesta reassured attendees that despite Donald Trump's re-election and intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, U.S. cities, states, and citizens would continue climate efforts. UN climate chief Simon Stiell urged nations to view climate finance as global self-interest rather than charity. Debates centered on financing as developing nations demanded increased funds to mitigate climate impacts. A report warned that 2024 may set record-high temperatures, with current policies risking a 3.1°C rise, far beyond Paris Agreement goals.



Analysis

Trump's return raises concerns about U.S. federal climate policy setbacks, though local efforts could counterbalance this. Disputes over climate finance highlight a rift between wealthy and developing nations. Record-high temperature forecasts underscore the urgency of action, but financial barriers and diverging priorities hinder progress toward Paris Agreement goals.

Way Forward

- **Secure Climate Finance Partnerships:** Collaborate with traditional and non-traditional donors for adaptation funds.
- **Prioritize Local Resilience:** Focus on sustainable agriculture, water management, and urban planning.
- **Regional Diplomacy:** Form coalitions with South Asian nations to strengthen demands for climate finance.
- **Expand National Policies:** Implement stricter emissions monitoring and public awareness campaigns.

Diplomatic Relations

Is Beijing pushing Islamabad on joint security plan?

Reuters reported that China was urging Pakistan to permit Chinese security personnel to protect its citizens working in Pakistan, following a recent car bombing in Karachi in which killed 2 Chinese engineers that exposed significant security vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch dismissed the report as 'motivated' claims that China plans to establish its own security measures for Chinese nationals in Pakistan, emphasizing that the country's counter-terrorism cooperation with China is grounded in mutual respect for each other's sovereignty.



Moreover, PM Shehbaz Sharif met with Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on the sidelines of the Climate Action Summit of COP-29 and highlighted the steps taken by the government for the security of the Chinese nationals in Pakistan and to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism. The Chinese vice premier expressed his desire to work with Pakistan to overcome security challenges and further expand Pak-China cooperation for the development and prosperity of the peoples of the two countries.

Pakistan, however, reportedly expressed willingness to allow Chinese officials to participate in security meetings and coordination. Pakistan had asked China for help in improving its intelligence and surveillance capabilities instead of direct involvement.

IG Police Sindh informed that the management/hosts/sponsors of projects in which Chinese nationals are involved were being asked to hire former servicemen for the security of the Chinese citizens. Joint training exercises would be conducted continuously to meet any emergency/eventuality. A hotline number has been provided for facilitation of Chinese citizens and for immediate contact with law enforcement agencies. Besides, it has been recommended to conduct security audits of private security companies. Moreover, the project owners/sponsors have been asked to implement SOP for security.

Analysis

China has expressed frustration over a streak of attacks on its citizens in Pakistan. Before Karachi incident, Chinese workers were attacked in Balochistan. Earlier Chinese had stopped work at Dasu Dam when nine engineers were killed in terrorist attack there. Now after the Karachi attack, they have shown their resentment over it. It is high time for Pakistan to pull up its socks and go all out for the security of Chinese in Pakistan. PM Shehbaz Sharif is personally looking into the issue and has ordered to take all necessary measures in this regard. However, handing over security of Chinese to Chinese is not under consideration.

Way Forward

- Greater Intelligence-Security coordination: To preempt terrorist attacks a greater and closer coordination between intelligence and LEAs is essential.
- Chinses help for intelligence and surveillance: China can impart training and give technology to Pakistan for improving its intelligence and surveillance capabilities.
- Fix responsibility: In case of terrorist attack on Chinese, the heads of intelligence and LEAs should be answerable.
- Eradicate terrorism: All out efforts ought to be unleashed as per a well-devised strategy to eliminate terrorism and insurgencies in Pakistan.

Environment

UNICEF Urges Action to Address Air Pollution in Punjab

UNICEF has called for urgent measures to combat air pollution and protect children's health, with over 11 million children under five years of age exposed to hazardous smog in Punjab's worst-affected districts. Young children are particularly vulnerable due to their smaller lungs, weaker immunity, and faster breathing rates, which increase their intake of harmful pollutants. These conditions heighten the risk of severe respiratory diseases. The organization urged authorities to strengthen enforcement of existing regulations and introduce stricter emissions policies for long-term protection.

Analysis

Pollution chart has gone through the roof. 2 million seek treatment as smog chokes Punjab. It has resulted in hundreds of hospitalizations, particularly among children, and its intensity is now observable from space. Even before this extreme smog, approximately 12% of deaths among children under five in Pakistan were attributed to air pollution. Fake fitness certificates, outdated laws, staff shortage impede fight against smog. In response, the Punjab government has closed schools in highly affected areas until mid-November and declared smog emergency and lock-down.



Artificial rain brought some reprieve as the AQI went down to 300 in Lahore which was still hazardous. UNICEF has urged the government to balance protecting children's health with ensuring their right to education.

Way Forward

- Fight on war footing: Government and public should go hand in hand to control this menace.
- Protect Children from Exposure: Families should keep children indoors during peak pollution hours (early mornings and evenings).
- Provide Medical Support: Mobile health units should be deployed to remote areas to address respiratory issues caused by smog exposure.
- Raise Public Awareness: Use radio, TV, social media, and community meetings to educate the public on minimizing smog exposure.
- Rain and rein in: Artificial rain and control on transport can bring immediate relief.

Agriculture

Wheat Production at Risk Amid Declining Prices



Pakistan's wheat production for the 2024-25 Rabi season is threatened by declining prices, which may disincentivize farmers from planting at scale, endangering food security. A government official warned that reduced yields could increase reliance on costly imports. Passco, responsible for maintaining wheat reserves, is financially strained, relying heavily on loans and facing large receivables. The Senate committee also raised concerns about inefficiencies in wheat imports and cotton cess collection in the textile sector.

Analysis

With wheat being a staple in Pakistan’s diet, declining production could exacerbate food insecurity and inflation. Passco’s financial issues further limit its ability to secure reserves. The cotton cess collection problem reflects broader governance inefficiencies, requiring urgent reform to stabilize the agricultural sector and protect rural livelihoods.

Way Forward:

- Support Wheat Prices: Implement subsidies or price support programs to ensure profitable cultivation.
- Strengthen Passco: Increase government funding and recover overdue receivables to maintain reserves.
- Enforce Cotton Cess Collection: Streamline processes to resolve disputes and enhance compliance.
- Improve Import Oversight: Strengthen regulations to prevent inefficiencies in agricultural imports.

Policy Nuggets

Incident/ News	Impact	Recommendation	Priority
Cop held for role in police HQ bombing in 2023 in which 86 lives perished.	Insiders, sleeper-cells and facilitators are as dangerous as the terrorists.	People from all spheres of life should keep their eyes open to identify the fifth columnists and facilitators.	Highest
Pakistan has missed out a Structural Benchmark (SB) for amending the Agriculture Income Tax (AIT) by the four legislating assemblies under the IMF condition till end October 2024.	Pakistan might have to seek a waiver from the IMF’s Executive Board on this slippage.	Pakistan must get rid of IMF stranglehold asap.	Highest
Use of VPNs to access blocked content deemed ‘un-Islamic’	It has earned sharp reaction considering it to throw the baby with the bath water.	<p>Objectionable content should be blocked.</p> <p>Misuse of social media to spread hatred and propaganda must be controlled.</p> <p>VPN being a tool can be used either way.</p> <p><i>"Freedom without responsibility is anarchy." — Thomas H. Huxley</i></p>	Highest

<p>'Welcome back': Trump, Biden shake hands in White House</p>	<p>This is the spirit demonstrated by the leaders who care for the sanctity of system and stability of state.</p>	<p>Amicability, maturity and selflessness ought to be essential ingredients of the national leaders.</p> <p><i>"True statesmanship is the art of changing a nation from what it is into what it ought to be." — William R. Alger</i></p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Major, soldier martyred in Harnai blast. Seven FC men martyred, 18 injured in Kalat terrorist attack</p>	<p>The ratio of martyrs is quite high.</p>	<p>Use of technology and intelligence should be enhanced.</p> <p><i>"Intelligence is the most powerful weapon of war." — Sun Tzu</i></p>	<p>Highest</p>
<p>Under Trump, Pakistan to be viewed through 'China, India lens'</p>	<p>Potential challenge for Pakistan.</p>	<p>FO to insist on viewing Pakistan independently, rather than through the lens of India or China.</p> <p><i>"Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else believe that its interest is being watched while you protect your own."</i></p>	<p>Highest</p>
<p>Maryam launches 'Life Easy Programme' for special persons.</p>	<p>Good initiative for eligible individuals who can apply for wheelchairs and hearing aids.</p>	<p>Rehabilitation of special persons should be government's top priorities.</p> <p><i>"The measure of a society is found in how it treats its weakest and most helpless citizens." — Jimmy Carter</i></p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Finance czar vows no more tax breaks for traders, farmers</p>	<p>Every sector, including real estate, wholesale and agriculture should brace for the impact of recovery of due taxes.</p>	<p>Compliance and enforcement to collect taxes from sectors other than salaried class and manufacturing sector too.</p> <p><i>"A fair tax system is not about punishment but about equity and justice." — John F. Kennedy</i></p>	<p>Highest</p>
<p>Biden allows Ukraine to use US arms to strike inside Russia</p>	<p>Escalation can be catastrophic because Russia will not back down.</p> <p>Russia thinks Trump might not be able to stop the war.</p> <p>WW III is in its embryonic stage.</p>	<p>China should warn the US to desist from getting directly involved in Russia-Ukraine war.</p> <p>All out efforts should be made to avoid the impending clash of civilizations.</p>	<p>High</p>



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