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OVERVIEW

This issue of *Policy Pulse* covers pressing security, economic, and environmental challenges, recent developments highlight the need for sustained institutional coordination and long-term resilience.

Pakistan's national security discourse remains at the forefront as terrorism resurges. A high-level Parliamentary Committee on National Security (PCNS) meeting underscored the need for implementing the National Action Plan (NAP) and 'Azm-i-Istehkam' to dismantle terrorist networks. Army Chief Gen Asim Munir called for a "hard state" approach, linking the rise in militancy to governance gaps. The urgency of a unified response was echoed, with particular concern over extremist exploitation of social media. Without sustained political will and institutional cohesion, efforts to curb terrorism risk fragmentation, leaving national security vulnerable to persistent threats.

Meanwhile, due to heightened security threats following the Jaffar Express attack in Balochistan, three major universities were closed. Efforts are afoot to achieve betterment in the situation to avoid prolonged closure of the universities.

Despite the truce, Israeli attacks continued in Gaza, resulting in deaths of hundreds of Palestinians. Israeli Airforce bombed hospitals and camps indiscriminately. Pakistan and the rest of the world condemned these atrocities.

On the international front, diplomatic and economic ties with Saudi Arabia gained momentum. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening defense and trade cooperation with Riyadh, emphasizing economic investments under Saudi Vision 2030. Similarly, the World Bank approved \$102 million for Pakistan's microfinance sector, a crucial step toward financial inclusion and climate resilience, particularly for rural communities. Policy Nuggets reinforce these developments by highlighting the IMF's resistance to tariff cuts, Pakistan's worsening deforestation crisis, and pressing water security threats, as Tarbela Dam nears its dead level. Pakistan must balance immediate security imperatives with long-term sustainability and economic stability to navigate the complex challenges ahead.

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Top-level huddle seeks consensus to fight terrorism

In a high-level meeting of Parliamentary Committee on National Security (PCNS), PM stressed the immediate implementation of counterterrorism strategies, including the National Action Plan (NAP) and Vision Azm-i-Istehkam, to combat rising terrorism. Meanwhile, Army Chief Gen Asim Munir attributed the surge in terrorist activities to governance shortcomings and advocated for strengthening Pakistan as a "hard state."

PCNS committee underscored the urgent need to enforce the National Action Plan and the 'Azm-i-Istehkam' strategy to dismantle terrorist networks, disrupt their logistical channels, and sever links between terrorism and crime, according to a communique released after the meeting. It also highlighted the importance of national unity and political determination in confronting terrorism with the full force of the state, urging a collective consensus in the fight against extremist threats. Additionally, the committee raised concerns over the growing exploitation of social media by terrorist groups and called for a structured approach to counter their digital operations.



Analysis

Pakistan's security situation remains precarious, with a surge in terror attacks, rising street crime, and persistent law-and-order challenges. Militant activities, particularly in border regions, highlight governance gaps and the evolving threats posed by extremist groups. Simultaneously, urban centers grapple with increasing street crime, eroding public confidence in law enforcement. Addressing these threats requires the urgent and comprehensive implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP), ensuring that counterterrorism measures are not only enforced but also adapted to emerging challenges. However, lasting security reforms can only be achieved through a unified political approach, where all parties set aside differences and build a national consensus to combat terrorism and crime. Without collective political will and institutional commitment, fragmented efforts will fail to create a secure and stable Pakistan.

Way Forward

- Ensure full implementation of NAP with strict monitoring and accountability.
- Establish a bipartisan security council with representation from all political parties to ensure continued unified approach.
- Introduce strict regulations to counter online radicalization and terrorist recruitment on social media.

3 Balochistan universities shut over 'security concerns'



Academic activities at the University of Balochistan have been halted with immediate effect. Sources indicate that this move is a response to recent security concerns and violent incidents. The suspension follows a tragic attack on the Jaffar Express near Sibi, where terrorists seized the train. The assault resulted in the deaths of at least 26 individuals, including 18 security personnel. Due to growing concerns over potential attacks, these universities have suspended in-person classes and transitioned to online learning as a precautionary measure.

Authorities are assessing the situation to determine if universities in comparatively safer regions should also be shut down. Following the train hijacking carried out by Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) separatists, security threats to universities in Balochistan, a southwestern province of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan and Iran, have escalated significantly.

Analysis

The indefinite closure of major universities in Balochistan due to security concerns has left thousands of students in an academic void, further marginalizing an already neglected population. The proposed shift to online learning is impractical given the province's poor internet infrastructure, exacerbating educational inequality. This decision follows a pattern of state neglect, with Baloch students facing disruptions and enforced disappearances under the guise of national security. While recent violence, including the Jaffar Express attack, is concerning, shutting down universities only deepens resentment rather than addressing the root causes of unrest. Instead of depriving students of education, the government should provide security, invest in digital infrastructure, and ensure that Balochistan's youth receive the same opportunities as students elsewhere in Pakistan.

Way Forward

- Deploy trained security personnel around universities to prevent attacks while allowing academic activities to continue.
- Install surveillance systems and establish emergency response protocols to enhance campus safety.
- Engage in dialogue with Baloch student representatives to understand their concerns and ensure their safety.

Nearly 9,000 died on migration routes in 2024: UN

United Nations reported that nearly 9,000 migrants lost their lives worldwide in 2024, making it the deadliest year on record. According to the UN, at least 8,938 fatalities occurred along migration routes, marking the fifth consecutive year of record-high numbers. Asia, Africa, and Europe experienced

particularly alarming mortality rates among migrants. International Organization for Migration (IOM) emphasized that the rising toll of migrant deaths is both unacceptable and preventable, urging immediate action to address the crisis.

Analysis

The alarming rise in migrant deaths at sea highlights the severe risks faced by those undertaking perilous journeys in search of safety and better opportunities. Factors such as inadequate search-and-rescue operations, unsafe vessels, and restrictive immigration policies contribute to this crisis. The humanitarian implications are profound, as families are torn apart and vulnerable individuals, including women and children, are disproportionately affected.



Economically, the loss of human capital impacts both origin and destination countries. This tragedy underscores the urgent need for stronger legal frameworks, including safer migration pathways, enhanced international cooperation on search-and-rescue efforts, and stricter measures against human trafficking networks. Without decisive action, the cycle of preventable deaths will continue, further exacerbating the global migration crisis.

Way Forward

- Enforce stricter penalties against human traffickers and smugglers, targeting networks that exploit vulnerable migrants.
- Enhance maritime migration laws to ensure compliance with international human rights and refugee protection standards.
- Engage in bilateral and multilateral agreements with transit and destination countries to address migration challenges collectively.

International Affairs

Over 400 Gazans killed in brazen Israeli attacks



Israeli airstrikes struck Gaza, resulting in the deaths of over 400 people. For almost 60 days, hostages and prisoners were released, food and supplies returned to markets, and people tried to navigate the ruins of their homes. However, after weeks of failed efforts to extend the ceasefire, Israeli warplanes launched attacks across the Gaza Strip, and the deaths started rising again.

Israel and Hamas blamed each other for breaking the truce, which had mostly held since January, giving relief to Gaza's 2.3 million residents, many of whom live among destroyed buildings. Israel's PM Netanyahu said he ordered the strikes because Hamas refused proposals to extend the ceasefire and promised to increase military action. The attacks targeted homes and tent camps across Gaza, while Israeli tanks fired from the border.

Analysis

Breach of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has once again plunged Gaza into violence, bringing devastating consequences for its already suffering population. Each side blames the other for breaking the truce, but the reality is that civilians bear the heaviest burden. Israel's intense bombing campaigns not only claim hundreds of lives but also destroy what little infrastructure remains, leaving families homeless, hospitals overwhelmed, and basic necessities scarce.

The renewed violence deepens the humanitarian crisis, trapping 2.3 million people in a war zone with no safe refuge. Beyond the immediate destruction, continuous bombings fuel long-term instability, resentment, and cycles of retaliation, making peace even more elusive. Instead of military escalation, urgent efforts should focus on diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and addressing the root causes of the conflict to prevent further suffering.

Way Forward

- Work with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to push for a collective Muslim response, urging global intervention for an immediate ceasefire.
- Engage with United Nations (UN) bodies, particularly the Security Council and Human Rights Council, to demand an end to Israeli airstrikes and ensure the protection of civilians.
- Continue raising the issue at UN General Assembly sessions, emphasizing the humanitarian crisis and calling for an independent Palestine.
- Provide medical aid, food, and financial assistance to Gaza through international relief organizations.

International Relations

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia vow to deepen ties, expand defense and economic cooperation

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan reiterated their dedication to enhancing ties, emphasizing cooperation in defense, security, trade, and investment. Both nations acknowledged the significance of working together to tackle regional security concerns. Recent talks focused on strengthening collaboration across various sectors, including economy, trade, investment, energy, and defense. Both leaders expressed satisfaction with the expanding economic partnership between their nations.



Prime Minister Shehbaz praised Saudi Arabia's commitment to boosting investments in key industries, emphasizing its crucial role in fostering Pakistan's economic growth and stability. Moreover,

comprehensive discussion held on the shifting regional dynamics and broader geopolitical landscape. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to working closely at all levels to advance their shared vision of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. Saudi crown prince recognized the valuable contributions of the Pakistani community in Saudi Arabia and pledged to enhance initiatives aimed at improving their well-being.

Analysis

Over the years, Pak-Saudi partnership has been expanded beyond traditional defense and security cooperation to encompass trade, investment, and energy collaboration. Saudi Arabia remains a key economic partner, providing financial assistance, oil supply support, and investment in Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors. In return, Pakistan has contributed to Saudi Arabia's security and workforce needs, with a large Pakistani expatriate community playing a vital role in the kingdom's economy. While both nations continue to strengthen institutional engagements and economic cooperation, their ties are also shaped by regional dynamics and evolving geopolitical interests, necessitating continued diplomatic efforts to maintain and enhance their strategic partnership.

Way Forward

- Establish a Pakistan-Saudi Economic Council to oversee and accelerate joint projects, ensuring efficient execution and resolution of investment-related bottlenecks.
- Strengthen the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) by creating a dedicated Saudi Desk to assist and fast-track Saudi investments in Pakistan.
- Negotiate improved labor agreements to ensure better wages, working conditions, and welfare support for Pakistani expatriates.

Socioeconomic Development

World Bank okays \$102m in financing to boost Pakistan's microfinance sector



The World Bank has sanctioned \$102 million in funding for a project designed to improve access to microcredit and strengthen the resilience of the microfinance sector and its borrowers, especially against climate-related challenges. This funding, allocated under the 'Resilient and Accessible Microfinance (RAM) Project', received approval from board of directors of World Bank.

World bank (WB) representative stated that the initiative aligns with WB broader strategy to expand financial inclusion in Pakistan and enhance resilience against climate change, as outlined in our newly established 10-year Country Partnership Framework. The project will benefit nearly 1.89 million people, including more than 1 million women and over 350,000 youth, and especially those in vulnerable and low-income rural areas.

Analysis

Microfinance serves as a lifeline for Pakistan's most vulnerable communities, empowering them to

sustain their livelihoods. As climate risks intensify, this project stands as a crucial shield, fortifying the microfinance sector against uncertainty. By reinforcing its resilience, the initiative ensures that essential financial services remain accessible to those who need them most—particularly in rural areas, offering hope and stability in an increasingly unpredictable world.

World bank’s Resilient and Accessible Microfinance (RAM) Project holds crucial importance for Pakistan’s rural communities vulnerable to climate shocks. It provides microcredit and recovery loans to help small farmers, women, and low-income households rebuild after disasters. By supporting microfinance institutions and introducing a Climate Risk Fund and agrotechnology solutions, the project strengthens financial resilience and promotes long-term economic empowerment in rural areas.

Way Forward

- Establish a National Climate-Resilient Microfinance Fund to provide continuous financial support beyond the RAM project.
- Develop specialized loan products with flexible repayment plans for those recovering from climate-related losses.
- Integrate microfinance programs with disaster relief policies to ensure quick financial assistance post-disaster.



Incident/News	Impact	Recommendation	Priority
Four cops martyred in Noshki attack	Escalating attacks on security personnel underscore worsening militancy in Balochistan.	Enhance intelligence-led operations against terrorist networks; strengthen coordination between law enforcement and local communities; invest in counter-radicalization initiatives. <i>"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson.</i>	Highest
IMF shoots down plan to cut power tariffs for now	Delayed tariff relief adds financial strain on businesses and households; potential impact on industrial productivity and economic growth.	Improve energy sector efficiency and reduce transmission losses to lower costs sustainably; explore alternative subsidies targeting vulnerable consumers without distorting fiscal stability; engage IMF in structured negotiations for phased tariff adjustments aligned with economic realities. <i>"The first rule of sustainability is to align with natural forces, or at least not try to defy them." – Paul Hawken</i>	Highest

Modi's interview signals shift in India-China relations?	Possible recalibration of regional power dynamics affecting Pakistan's strategic calculus.	Closely monitor evolving India-China ties and recalibrate Pakistan's diplomatic positioning; leverage regional forums to safeguard strategic interests. <i>"Diplomacy is the art of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they ask for directions." — Winston Churchill.</i>	High
Pakistan losing 11,000 hectares of forest cover every year: WWF-P	Alarming deforestation threatens climate resilience, biodiversity, and water security.	Implement stricter forest conservation policies and reforestation programs; incentivize sustainable land use practices in vulnerable areas. <i>"A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land." — Franklin D. Roosevelt.</i>	Highest
Shehbaz meets MBS in Jeddah: Pakistan, S. Arabia vow to deepen defence, security ties	Strengthened Pakistan-Saudi ties reinforce defense and economic cooperation.	Expand military collaboration, particularly in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing; accelerate economic partnerships under Vision 2030. <i>"The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home." — Confucius.</i>	High
Pakistanis happier than most others in South Asia	Despite economic and security challenges, resilience remains a defining trait of Pakistani society.	Invest in social well-being indicators such as mental health services, education, and community-driven development programs. <i>"Happiness depends upon ourselves." — Aristotle.</i>	High
Tarbela Dam almost reaches dead level	Critical water shortages threaten agriculture, energy production, and urban supply.	Implement immediate water conservation measures; fast-track new water storage infrastructure; promote smart irrigation practices. <i>"Thousands have lived without love, not one without water." — W.H. Auden.</i>	Highest
South Africa, Pakistan to deepen defence cooperation	Strengthens Pakistan's defense partnerships beyond traditional allies.	Expand military training exchanges and joint exercises; explore defense technology collaboration. <i>"The soldier's most powerful weapon is not just his rifle, but the alliances that stand behind him." — Carl von Clausewitz</i>	High
CDA to engage cyber security firm to safeguard digital infrastructure	Rising cyber threats necessitate robust security frameworks for digital governance.	Strengthen public sector cybersecurity policies; conduct periodic audits and drills to mitigate digital vulnerabilities. <i>"Cybersecurity is much more than a matter of IT—it's a matter of national security." — Barack Obama</i>	High

Pakistan raises Jaffar Express terror attack in UNSC	Internationalizing Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts strengthens its global position.	Sustain diplomatic engagement at the UN and other forums; advocate for global counterterrorism cooperation against regional threats. <i>"Terrorism anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere."</i> – Kofi Annan	Highest
Met Office warns of drought in three provinces	It will adversely impact agriculture and life in general across the country.	Implement nationwide water conservation campaigns; Develop infrastructure for rainwater harvesting; Formulate emergency response plans. <i>"Drought preparedness today is better than crisis management tomorrow."</i> – Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General.	High



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