



WEEKLY

# POLICY PULSE

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### OVERVIEW

This week's *Policy Pulse* delivers a comprehensive snapshot of Pakistan's evolving policy landscape, spanning space ambitions, climate resilience, governance reform, regional diplomacy, and humanitarian crises. Against a backdrop of shifting global alliances and domestic imperatives, the issue captures how Pakistan seeks to align national priorities ranging from lunar missions to flood rehabilitation with broader geopolitical realities.

Key highlights reveal a dual commitment to **technological advancement** and **resilient governance**. On the innovation front, Pakistan's SUPARCO plans a lunar mission by 2035 and its first astronaut to China's space station by 2026, underscoring a deepening strategic partnership with Beijing. Climate adaptation features prominently with relief packages, renewable energy projects, and education initiatives in flood-hit Gilgit-Baltistan, though gaps in early warning systems persist. Health sector updates show a surge in private facilities in Islamabad, raising regulatory and waste management challenges.

Regional diplomacy remains fluid: Pakistan navigates complex dynamics from Gaza's deepening humanitarian crisis and calls for international intervention, to US–India trade tensions offering new export opportunities for Pakistan. Labour migration data points to Saudi Arabia as the top destination for Pakistani workers which reflect an evolving Gulf labor markets. Security updates highlight both counterterrorism successes and persistent militant threats in KP and Balochistan.

For public sector practitioners, some of the accompanying Policy Nuggets distill complex dynamics into actionable priorities. Security agencies must urgently address emerging threats like drone-enabled terrorism through enhanced detection systems and community engagement. Climate-vulnerable regions require immediate investment in early-warning infrastructure and risk-informed development planning. Governance reforms should focus on accelerating corruption cases through NAB's streamlined procedures while combating digital misinformation through coordinated oversight. Together, these recommendations form a pragmatic roadmap for navigating Pakistan's multifaceted challenges, one that acknowledges the interplay between visionary policymaking and grounded, accountable implementation in pursuit of sustainable progress.

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### Suparco tasked with launching lunar mission by 2035



Pakistan’s SUPARCO will send a lunar mission by 2035 and its first astronaut to China’s space station by 2026. This increasing space and tech cooperation with China comes under the “Uraan Pakistan” initiative.

#### Analysis

Pakistan’s intention to send a lunar mission by 2035 and an astronaut by 2026 indicates its increased emphasis on space and technology, supported by robust partnership with China. This is a significant milestone in connecting scientific advancement with national development objectives.

#### Way Forward

- Encourage private sector participation in space research and innovation to reduce costs and enhance local technological capacities.
- Establish a specialized space training facility to train future generations of astronauts.
- To regulate commercial space activities, provide safety standards and govern satellite launches.

### Flood-hit GB to get Rs4bn, 100MW solar project: PM



PM Shehbaz Sharif announced a Rs4 billion relief package, a 100MW solar park, and Danish Schools for flood-affected Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), underlining immediate action for climate change and infrastructure restoration. He also assured continued federal assistance and established a special committee to address longer-term development and governance challenges of the region.

#### Analysis

The government’s response in GB indicates a transition to proactive climate resilience and social investment in the form of renewable energy and education. Yet, the delays in launching early warning systems indicate continuing governance and preparedness deficits.

#### Way Forward

- Construct climate-controlled warehouses throughout GB to stock critical food supplies in the event of weather blockages or emergencies.
- Train local media to write about climate issues and engage in accountability reporting.
- Make it mandatory for all upcoming infrastructure and housing developments in GB to go through risk and climate vulnerability mapping prior to approval.

### Private hospitals, clinics rapidly rising in capital, NA



Ministry of National Health Services has informed the National Assembly that the number of private healthcare facilities in Islamabad has grown to 2,444. Regarding medical waste disposal, it was informed that Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) is taking all measures to ensure compliance. Meanwhile, the government is upgrading public hospitals with modern emergency, cancer, and maternity units.

#### Analysis

The rapid rise of private clinics and hospitals in Islamabad has converged with an increased demand for effective healthcare as public hospitals fail to accommodate a growing population. However, this rapid expansion require an effective regulation to ensure that there is no compromise on quality of health services.

#### Way Forward

- Implement environmental impact assessment prior to issuing licenses to new private healthcare units to ensure effective medical waste disposal capacity.
- Make it mandatory for all private healthcare facilities to geo-tag their vehicle locations and dumping grounds so that IHRA can monitor.
- Institute community-level public awareness campaigns on the risks of inappropriate disposal of medical waste.

### Israel considers full Gaza takeover as more die of hunger



Israeli PM Netanyahu is planning a complete military occupation of Gaza for the first time since 2005 as ceasefire negotiations have collapsed and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. 8 more deaths due to starvation and 79 fatalities in new Israeli attacks were reported by Gaza’s health ministry.

#### Analysis

Netanyahu’s call for complete takeover of Gaza marks a dramatic policy shift where Israel is brazenly and illegally announcing military occupation of Gaza. The humanitarian emergency meanwhile worsens, with starvation-related deaths mounting amidst incessant Israeli attacks.

#### Way Forward

- Leverage Pakistan’s global diaspora to raise awareness and exert pressure on Western governments for a peaceful resolution and accountability for war crimes.
- Propose and support an emergency session of the UN General Assembly or Human Rights Council to highlight starvation and displacement in Gaza.
- Introduce a parliamentary resolution condemning the occupation and urging international legal action against war crimes.

### PM directs FBR to eliminate bureaucratic barriers



PM Shehbaz Sharif directed FBR to bring tax and customs reforms fully into practice by eliminating bureaucratic obstacles, adopting technology, and urged federal-provincial coordination. He expressed satisfaction over historic tax-to-GDP growth to 10.24%. He was informed that tax return forms in Urdu have been introduced which is expected to benefit approximately 84pc of return filers.

#### Analysis

The PM's directions represent a thrust for more profound tax and customs reforms via technology, institution-building, and federal-provincial harmonization to maintain record growth in revenue. The introduction of Urdu tax return forms is expected to increase access and compliance for most taxpayers.

#### Way Forward

- Conduct yearly independent audits of FBR and customs officials' performance to eliminate persistent bureaucratic bottlenecks.
- Open physical one-stop service centers in urban and rural areas to complement online Urdu tax returns, targeting digitally excluded people.
- Launch an information campaign to raise public awareness of FBR reforms, highlighting benefits like faster processing.

### US stuns India with massive tariff as ties hit new low



US has slammed India with a new additional 25% tariff on top of an existing 25%, bringing the total to 50%. This dramatic move, which comes as US accuses India of purchasing Russian oil, marks the lowest point yet in US-India relations. India has denounced the move as unfortunate and noted it is not the only country importing oil from Russia. Whilst one official source says there is still room for negotiation, the country is planning relief to exporters.

#### Analysis

This sweeping tariff escalation not only threatens key Indian export sectors—like textiles, footwear, gems and jewelry—but also signals a shift toward transactional diplomacy, as US-India strategic trust erodes.

#### Way Forward

- Pakistan should actively promote its significantly lower US tariff rate (19%) to attract export buyers looking to shift from India.
- Accelerate domestic reforms—especially reducing electricity and borrowing costs—to ensure competitiveness considering this window of opportunity.
- Diversify and fast-track export efforts in textiles, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture to capitalize on the opportunity as Indian exports face barriers.

### Saudi Arabia emerges as top destination for Pakistani workers, data shows



According to data from the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Saudi Arabia emerged as the leading destination with over 70% of Pakistani migrant workers traveling there for job in the first half of 2025. This marks a shift as earlier UAE was the top destination, however, since 2022 recruitment has dropped by 94%. Whilst the most in-demand occupations include electricians, painters, plumbers etc., there is a consistent demand for qualified professionals in destination countries.

#### Analysis

Saudi Arabia's leadership in hiring Pakistani workers in 2025 indicates its enormous Vision 2030 labor requirement, whilst decline in hiring in UAE points to altering Gulf job markets and tightening immigration regulations. The trend underlines Pakistan's strong dependence on low-skilled migration for remittances, with skillful and professional workforce exports not seeing much growth.

#### Way Forward

- Strengthen welfare and legal assistance to Pakistanis abroad.
- Incentivize formal remittance channels to maintain inflows.
- Rebuild UAE employment access through policy and diplomatic involvement.

### 11 martyred in terror attacks across KP, Balochistan



Eight security personnel and three civilians were martyred in multiple coordinated terror attacks across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, as militant groups targeted police and military installations in increasingly brazen assaults. Moreover, there were also an ambush on DC and ADC convoy in the Habib Kot area of the Ladha tehsil, Upper South Waziristan, whilst a soldier of the Pakistan Navy was injured in an attack near the Bachkan Ahmadzai area in Lakki Marwat district.

#### Analysis

The spate of violence underscores a troubling resurgence of militancy in Pakistan's northwest regions, reflecting both the evolving tactics of militant networks and persistent security vulnerabilities in border and rural areas.

#### Way Forward

- Reinforce security at vulnerable check posts and convoy routes and fortify chokepoints, especially in rural and border zones.
- Enhance intelligence-sharing and coordination between federal and provincial agencies to preempt attacks and disrupt militant communication networks.
- Launch community outreach and counter-radicalization programs in affected areas to build local trust and improve early warning from grassroots sources.

## Govt rules out KP military operation



In the face of vigorous protest from the opposition, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry ruled out any military operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), but stated that actions against the militants would continue under the National Action Plan (NAP). Separately, during the Question Hour, the Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani informed that 19% tariff rate offered to Pakistan was lowest in the region. Moreover, the change in the US tariff from 29pc to 19pc saved Pakistan at least \$1 billion.

### Analysis

The government's stance to not conduct any military operation in KP underscores the evolving preference for intelligence-based strategies over large-scale military offensives—reflecting both political sensitivity and increasing provincial insistence on operational consent.

### Way Forward

- Strengthen and expand intelligence-based operations to target confirmed militant hideouts, ensuring minimal civilian disruption.
- Prioritize implementation of NAP through closer coordination among federal, provincial, and tribal stakeholders.
- Institutionalize regular jirgas to reinforce local ownership of security measures and bolster community support.

## Saudi crown prince invites Shehbaz to investment conference



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has formally invited PM Shehbaz Sharif to participate in the 9th Future Investment Initiatives (FII) Forum scheduled in Riyadh from October 27 to 30, 2025. The invitation letter was handed over by the Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-Malky. During the invitation handover ceremony, discussions also briefly touched on recent regional developments. Separately, the PM also welcomed the historic peace agreement signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the White House under the auspices of US President Trump.

### Analysis

The invitation underscores Pakistan's continued strategic economic partnership with Saudi Arabia and offers a timely platform for Islamabad to attract critical investment amid its economic recovery efforts.

### Way Forward

- Leverage the FII Forum to showcase Pakistan as a stable investment destination, emphasizing gains under the economic reforms agenda.
- Arrange side meetings with Saudi investors and sovereign funds at the forum to accelerate concrete investment commitments.
- Present Pakistan's regional peace diplomacy and geostrategic role at the event as added value to enhance investor confidence.

## Israeli plan to occupy Gaza draws world's ire



Israel's security cabinet has approved a controversial plan to seize full military control of Gaza City and demilitarize the strip including "the establishment of an alternative civil administration that is neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority". This has sparked widespread condemnation from the UN, EU, China, Britain, Turkey and Arab nations warning that this move would further threaten peace and deepen the humanitarian crisis. Whilst Germany has taken the extraordinary step of halting military exports to Israel. Meanwhile Pakistan has called Israel's plan a front to expand its "genocidal" military campaign against Palestinians.

### Analysis

The plan marks a perilous escalation during an already protracted conflict, with mounting fears it could displace up to a million civilians, worsen famine, and is a clear violation of international law.

### Way Forward

- Pakistan should use its seat in the OIC and UN to unite Muslim to demand an immediate ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Mobilize Pakistani NGOs and development agencies to support displaced Gazans through funding, medical aid, and refugee relief programs.
- Push for international investigations and legal action via the UN and ICC to hold perpetrators accountable.

## Govt expects investment in mines, export of refined copper to US



The Commerce Minister informed the National Assembly, that US has shown interest to invest in mines and minerals, including copper, as under the new tariff agreement refined copper has been exempted from a previously punitive 50% duty. Hence, Pakistan will be able to take advantage of the opportunity and export value-added copper to the US markets.

### Analysis

This development marks a strategic pivot from exporting raw copper to higher-value refined products, positioning Pakistan to better leverage its vast reserves in global clean-energy supply chains and potentially reduce its trade deficit.

### Way Forward

- Establish incentives—such as tax breaks—for building copper refining facilities near mining hubs.
- Scale up Geological Survey of Pakistan's efforts to map copper reserves beyond Reko Diq.
- Strengthen security protocols and combat regulatory ambiguity in Balochistan to reassure investors.

# Policy Nuggets

## 1 PM order early warning system in GB amid flood crisis

### Impact

Enhances climate disaster preparedness

### Recommendation

Establish early warning and monitoring centre in GB; relocate populations from waterways; survey infrastructure damage; and integrate climate-resilient planning with NDMA and Ministry of Climate Change.

*"Early warning systems save lives. Investment in preparedness is not charity – it's a cost-effective necessity in a warming world."*

Petteri Taalas

## 4 Security forces repel India-backed terror in Mastung

### Impact

Highlights persistent cross-border threats and sacrifice of armed forces

### Recommendation

Strengthen counterterrorism intelligence in Balochistan; and intensify operations against Indian proxy networks.

*"Terrorism is a threat to all humankind. It seeks to divide and destroy – we must unite to defeat it."*

Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General

## 7 PM calls for unified strategy on rapid population growth

### Impact

Addresses alarming 2.55% annual growth rate and aims to convert youth bulge into economic asset

### Recommendation

Formulate coordinated federal-provincial policy; launch nationwide awareness campaigns; and integrate population planning with sustainable economic development and youth employment initiatives.

*"Sustainable development starts with sustainable population growth."* – Ban Ki-moon

## 2 Pakistan reaffirms support on Youm-i-Istehsal

### Impact

Condemns India's unilateral actions in Kashmir and reinforces Pakistan's regional peace stance

### Recommendation

Maintain robust diplomatic campaign at UN; and highlight illegal demographic changes and repression in IIOJK.

*"Kashmir is one of the most protracted and bloody occupations in the world – and one of the most ignored."* Arundhati Roy

## 5 PM pushes for world-class Jinnah Medical Complex

### Impact

Aims to deliver international-standard healthcare access to all provinces and regions

### Recommendation

Ensure third-party validation and merit-based recruitment; and accelerate geotechnical and social impact studies.

*"Healthcare must heal beyond borders—JMC will set the new national standard."* – PM Shehbaz Sharif

## 8 Combating AI-Driven Misinformation in Pakistan

### Impact

AI-driven misinformation threatens national security and cohesion, prompting modernization of digital communication tools

### Recommendation

Form a bipartisan committee to counter fake news; expand AI monitoring; strengthen fact-checking mechanisms; enhance digital literacy campaigns; and promote responsible online behavior through public awareness initiatives.

*"The challenge of misinformation is not just technological—it is a test of our unity."* António Guterres

## 3 NAB adopts new strategy to fast-track white-collar trials

### Impact

Speeds up prosecution of co-accused in mega corruption cases and curbs legal loopholes

### Recommendation

Replicate separate-case model nationwide under AMLA 2010; isolate co-accused for quicker arrests and trials; and revise SOPs to enhance efficiency.

*"A government that is transparent and accountable is a government that works for the people."* Barack Obama

## 6 ECP narrows gender gap in voter registration to 7.4%

### Impact

Marks progress in women's political inclusion and boosts democratic representation

### Recommendation

Accelerate women's CNIC and voter registration drives; and expand Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework (GMSIF).

*"When women participate fully in politics, the whole society benefits."* – Michelle Bachelet

## 9 Soldier Martyred in Bannu Quadcopter Attack

### Impact

Highlights evolving terrorist tactics using drone technology, threatening regional stability and frontline security personnel

### Recommendation

Strengthen counter-drone detection and interception systems in high-risk zones; and incentivize public reporting of suspicious activity through awareness campaigns.

*"Security is strongest when vigilance is shared."* John F. Kennedy



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