



WEEKLY

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OVERVIEW

This week's *Policy Pulse* captures Pakistan's multifaceted policy agenda, navigating a complex interplay of economic outreach, climate vulnerability, and institutional reform. The issue underscores a strategic pivot towards strengthening external economic linkages while confronting persistent domestic challenges in fiscal governance and climate resilience. From pursuing agricultural trade with Iran to advocating for global climate justice, it reveals a nation balancing crisis management with long-term strategic positioning.

Key insights reveal a focus on *external partnerships* and *internal systemic strengthening*. Initiatives like CPEC-II industrial cooperation with China and energy talks with US, aim to fuel growth and stability, while domestic efforts to digitalize tax systems and reforming state media seek to enhance efficiency and accountability. However, these are set against a stark backdrop of fiscal irregularities exposed by the Auditor General and a devastating climate disaster cycle, highlighting a critical gap between intention and implementation. The analysis strikes a cautious tone—celebrating counter-terrorism successes and diplomatic advocacy while flagging deep-seated issues in justice delivery, healthcare, and digital rights protection.

These developments mirror global and regional shifts. The need to push for domestic reforms with call for global action to tackle the issue of climate change, focusing on AI-driven governance reforms within ethical framework and regulating OTT platform reflects a need to change the current governance and public administration framework. Whilst showcasing Pakistan's historical artefacts in SCO summit and joint calls with China for Kabul to act on militancy illustrate soft power and new geopolitics of linking security with economic integration.

Policy Nuggets focus on economic diplomacy, need for climate resilience and fast and reliable internet infrastructure, and success of counter-terrorism operation. The recommendations in the Policy Nuggets provide actionable measures and practical solutions to address Pakistan's interconnected challenges.

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NA body wants comprehensive business plan for making PTV financially stable



The National Assembly Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting instructed the ministry to formulate a cohesive business plan to render PTV financially sound, pursue new revenues, and bring OTT/web-TV platforms under regulation, as well as pursuing the matter with Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) regarding embezzlement of APP pension accounts.

Analysis

This step underlines the imperative for state media fiscal restructuring and tighter regulatory mechanisms to deal with digital disruptions. However, its success shall be possible upon proper implementation, accountability, and minimizing political interference in bodies such as PTV and PEMRA.

Way Forward

- Collaborate with private production companies, universities, and start-ups to co-create content, minimizing state burden while maximizing innovation.
- Digitize the historic drama and news records of PTV and distribute them through YouTube/OTT with international outreach.
- Launch a contemporary subscription-based OTT platform similar to Netflix to offer premium Pakistani entertainment and educational content.

Pakistan faces intensifying climate disaster cycle without adequate global support: Sherry



Senator Sherry Rehman while delivering a keynote address at the National Climate Justice Youth Film Festival 2025 cautioned that Pakistan has an escalating climate disaster cycle, made worse by deforestation, plastic waste, and poor local policies, despite contributing only less than 1% to global emissions. She urged the youth to be agents of change and stated that without global support the issue of climate change cannot be tackled alone.

Analysis

Senator Sherry Rehman's address identifies the twofold challenge of international climate injustice and national mismanagement, pointing out that Pakistan has to build local resilience, stop environmental destruction, and push richer nations for climate funds and responsibility.

Way Forward

- Shift from government-exclusive afforestation pushes towards village-level forest management councils.
- Create pilot projects that can turn non-recyclable plastic waste into useful energy, lessening both urban flooding and power shortages.
- Build a South Asian Climate Resilience Alliance to collectively negotiate loss-and-damage compensation and exchange adaptation technologies with the Global North.

2 more polio cases bring this year's tally to 21



Two new polio cases in Kohistan (KP) and Badin (Sindh) brought Pakistan's 2025 total to 21, indicating lingering risks even with countrywide immunization campaigns that vaccinated more than 28 million kids in September.

Analysis

The persistence of polio incidents demonstrates instances of vaccine resistance, uneven campaign reporting, and geographic disparities and suggests that eradication demands increased community commitment, building of trust, and sustained immunization activities.

Way Forward

- Develop a block-chain digital immunization record attached to every child's birth certificate so that no child is left behind in campaigns.
- Formalize alliances with mosque imams, educators, and women community leaders to combat myths on vaccines.
- Incorporate small community rewards (like school supplies or food rations) linked with complete child immunization, making families more likely to participate.

'Unprecedented' downpour leaves Karachi paralysed



The unprecedented heavy downpour paralysed Karachi, killed six, flooded roads and homes and disrupted flights and power. The Sindh government declared a public holiday while rescue efforts continued amid warnings of more rain. PM Shehbaz Sharif spoke with Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, and expressed his concern over the heavy rains in Karachi and other cities.

Analysis

The disaster highlights Karachi's weak infrastructure and governance gaps, exposing the urgent need for better urban planning, disaster preparedness, and climate-resilient development.

Way Forward

- Upgrade and expand stormwater drains and sewerage systems to handle extreme monsoon rains.
- Remove illegal constructions and encroachments blocking natural drainage channels.
- Strengthen Rescue-1122 and city emergency services with boats, pumps, and rapid-response teams.

Rape cases conviction rate 'alarmingly low'



From 2021 to mid-2025, Islamabad registered 567 rape cases with only 80 convictions, reflecting an alarmingly low conviction rate despite numerous arrests and trials, alongside related issues of sexual abuse and missing children cases.

Analysis

The persistently weak conviction rate highlights systemic flaws in investigation and prosecution. There is an urgent need of judicial reforms and stronger evidence collection to ensure justice and deterrence.

Way Forward

- Police need specialized training, forensic support, and victim-centered protocols to ensure strong evidence collection that can withstand trial scrutiny.
- Establish dedicated courts for rape and child abuse cases with strict timelines to help reduce prolonged trials and backlog.
- Parliamentary standing committees should continuously review pending cases, identify loopholes in prosecution, and ensure accountability of investigative agencies.

Pakistan, China urge Kabul to rein in terror outfits



At the 6th Pakistan–Afghanistan–China trilateral dialogue in Kabul on August 21, 2025, Pakistan and China jointly urged the Taliban-led Afghan government to take concrete and verifiable action against terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil. Whilst no joint communique has been issued, Pakistan's Foreign Office said that the three countries agreed to strengthen efforts against terrorism and reaffirmed commitments to deepen cooperation in trade, transit, regional development, health, education, culture, combating narcotics and expanding CPEC into Afghanistan.

Analysis

This move underscores the intertwined nature of regional diplomacy, where security cooperation is being leveraged alongside economic integration. With China playing a mediating role, the economic development between the three countries presents an opportunity to bring stability in the region.

Way Forward

- Only expand CPEC into Afghanistan if the Taliban acts against terrorists.
- Work more closely with Afghan authorities to stop militants from crossing into Pakistan.
- Continue regular talks with China and Afghanistan to push for both peace and regional development.

ATC law amendment ends years-long civil-military debate on missing persons



Parliament has revised the Anti-Terrorism Act to provide security agencies with a 90-day detention authority, breaking years of civil-military gridlock. The amendment seeks to address the problem of missing persons and enhance counter-terrorism operations.

Analysis

While the amendment gives security forces long-awaited legal cover, it threatens human rights. Hence, judicial oversight and accountability are essential to reconcile security with civil liberties.

Way Forward

- Maintain official records of all detainees and notify families promptly to prevent enforced disappearances
- Create independent oversight bodies, including parliamentarians and human rights representatives, to regularly monitor cases.
- Conduct periodic reviews in parliament to assess the law's implementation and its impact on human rights and security.

Israel okays plan to 'erase' idea of Palestinian state



According to a statement from Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, the defence ministry planning commission has granted final approval to the E1 project which would divide the occupied West Bank and cut it off from East Jerusalem. The E1 project involves construction of about 3,400 new housing units. It is expected that the work could begin within a few months with house building in about a year. This proposed plan would completely nullify the prospect of a Palestinian state and has been condemned by Israel's Western allies as violation of international law.

Analysis

The plan deepens the fragmentation of Palestinian territory and strikes a severe blow to the viability of the two-state solution. The controversial plan has triggered strong backlash globally which signals increasing isolation for Israel among Western allies.

Way Forward

- Publicly and consistently support UN and global efforts to reaffirm the two-state solution, emphasizing Pakistan's stance against territorial fragmentation.
- Use Pakistan's voice in multilateral forums to highlight the legal breaches of international conventions posed by Israel's settlement expansion.
- Increase Pakistan's support for displaced Palestinians and affected communities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

AGP uncovers Rs375tr ‘irregularities’ in federal finances



The Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) uncovered over Rs375 trillion in financial irregularities in federal government accounts for FY2023–24, noting only 13% of public funds went towards socio-economic services, with the rest consumed largely by debt servicing.

Analysis

The findings highlight deep systemic flaws—ineffective internal controls and lack of oversight—exacerbated by excessive supplementary grants and mismanaged budgeting, underscoring urgent need for fiscal governance reforms.

Way Forward

- Ensure all supplementary grants are approved by Parliament, with no exceptions, to enhance transparency and accountability.
- Empower and modernize internal audit functions across federal entities to detect discrepancies early and enforce financial discipline.
- Reallocate budget that allows enhanced financing of development sectors such as health and education.

Israel kills 5 journalists in strikes on Gaza hospital



An Israeli airstrike on the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis killed at least 20 people, including five journalists from agencies such as Reuters, the AP, and Al Jazeera, sparking international condemnation. According to media watchdogs, the war on Gaza has been one of the deadliest for journalists, with about 200 media workers having been killed over nearly two-year Israeli assault.

Analysis

The incident underscores a stark escalation in threats to press freedom and medical neutrality in conflict zones, and raises serious questions about adherence to international humanitarian law.

Way Forward

- Leverage Pakistan’s UN membership to push for a UN Security Council resolution mandating enhanced protections for journalists and medical personnel in conflict zones.
- Launch a diplomatic initiative through the OIC, urging member states to jointly demand independent investigations and accountability for such strikes.
- Mobilize Pakistani media and civil society to build awareness campaigns spotlighting attacks on press freedom, reinforcing Pakistan’s leadership in championing journalist safety globally.

Pakistan to showcase historical artefacts at SCO summit in China



Pakistan is sending ten artefacts—from the Neolithic Mehrgarh figurine (c.3000–3500 BCE) to the Islamic period—spanning its rich heritage trail, to be exhibited at the SCO summit in Beijing opening August 31 at the National Museum of China.

Analysis

This cultural showcase underscores Pakistan’s soft-power diplomacy, reinforcing regional cultural ties and promoting its historical legacy within the SCO framework.

Way Forward

- Launch virtual exhibitions and immersive media alongside the physical artefact display to engage global audiences beyond Islamabad and Beijing.
- Promote heritage tourism through SCO channels to boost cultural foot traffic.
- Leverage artefact diplomacy for academic collaboration enabling knowledge exchange and preservation best practices.

AI can transform public sector: Ahsan Iqbal



Addressing the opening session of the two-day third Annual Public Policy Conference on “Artificial Intelligence in Public Policy and Governance”, held on 25-26th Aug, 2025 at the National School of Public Policy (NSPP), Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal stated that artificial intelligence (AI) will fundamentally reshape governance in Pakistan. He urged for establishing of AI training centers, ethical safeguards, and collaboration between government, academia, and industry to build a prosperous, inclusive, and competitive nation.

Analysis

The conference organized by NSPP emphasizes a need for proactive digital transformation of Pakistan’s public sector, and highlights the need for capacity-building, ethical framing, cross-sector collaboration, and reliable data as core enablers of AI-driven governance reforms.

Way Forward

- Launch AI capacity-building hubs for civil servants to integrate AI skills into governance.
- Institutionalize ethical AI frameworks to ensure AI systems are transparent, equitable, and inclusive across Pakistan’s diverse populations.
- Facilitate joint innovation between startups, universities, and government to pilot AI solutions.

Policy Nuggets

1 Pakistan, Iran set \$3bn target for agri-trade in two years

Impact

Expands bilateral trade to \$3bn, and strengthens food security.

Recommendation

Secure long-term rice and meat export contracts; resolve mango export hurdles; and enhance border infrastructure, cold chain, and customs facilitation.

"Nations become neighbours when they trade, not when they clash." – Jean Monnet

4 PM Shehbaz's China visit to mark formal launch of CPEC-II

Impact

Shifts CPEC focus to industrial cooperation, trade, and technology-driven growth.

Recommendation

Prioritize high-impact projects; resolve visa delays; and harness AI, industrial relocation, and training opportunities to boost exports and competitiveness.

"Development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies." – Joseph E. Stiglitz

7 PM orders ban on construction in flood-prone zones

Impact

Unregulated construction, deforestation, and poor preparedness worsened flood devastation, claiming 700+ lives.

Recommendation

Enforce strict ban on hazardous construction; launch national reforestation drive; and strengthen disaster preparedness through federal-provincial coordination.

"We cannot stop natural disasters, but we can arm ourselves with knowledge: so many lives wouldn't have to be lost if there was enough disaster preparedness." – Petra Nemcova

2 Cloudburst dispute exposes climate readiness gaps

Impact

Confusion over terminology undermines disaster response and public trust.

Recommendation

Strengthen PMD-PDMA coordination; expand real-time observation network; and align communication with global meteorological standards.

"Without data, you're just another person with an opinion." – W. Edwards Deming

5 Pakistan, US discuss enhanced cooperation in energy sector

Impact

Opens avenues for US investment in oil, gas, and minerals; supports Pakistan's energy security.

Recommendation

Fast-track exploration bidding; facilitate US-Pakistan corporate linkages; and leverage US tech to unlock shale reserves.

"The future of energy is not just about resources, but about partnerships." – Fatih Birol

8 Over 30 militants killed in Bajaur mosque blast

Impact

Explosion destroyed terror hideout, averting planned attack; major setback to militants in border region.

Recommendation

Sustain intelligence-led operations; secure border zones; and strengthen community engagement to deny militants safe havens.

"Terrorism is the enemy of all humanity." Hillary Clinton

3 FBR notifies simplified e-return form for taxpayers

Impact

Enhances tax compliance, transparency, and ease for individuals and SMEs.

Recommendation

Expand multilingual access; ensure robust data integration; and mandate timely rollout to avoid uncertainty.

"The hardest thing in the world to understand is income tax." – Albert Einstein

6 Balochistan 'back online' after weeks without data

Impact

16-day suspension disrupted business, education, and communication; court upholds citizens' constitutional rights.

Recommendation

Ensure proportional, time-bound security measures; protect digital rights; and balance security with uninterrupted connectivity.

"Access to the Internet is a basic right. It should be treated as a utility, not a luxury." – Vint Cerf

9 Floods trigger health emergency in Swat & Buner

Impact

Surge in diarrhoea, cholera, skin and respiratory diseases; acute medicine shortages risk preventable deaths.

Recommendation

Ensure urgent vaccine & medicine supply; deploy mobile clinics & clean water systems; and prioritise preventive healthcare and sanitation in flood-hit zones.

"Health emergencies know no borders; preparedness and response must be collective." – Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus



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