



WEEKLY

# POLICY PULSE

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## OVERVIEW

This week's *Policy Pulse* presents a stark juxtaposition of persistent challenges and emerging opportunities within Pakistan's public sector. From health emergencies and climate disasters to governance reforms and international partnerships, the issue captures the complex landscape in which policymakers must operate. It highlights how systemic vulnerabilities—whether in healthcare, disaster response, or fiscal transparency—continue to test institutional resilience, while strategic initiatives like CPEC's second phase and digital currency regulation offer pathways toward sustainable development.

Key insights reveal a nation grappling with multifaceted crises. The urgent polio vaccination campaign in Sindh and the HIV outbreak in Taunsa underscore critical gaps in public health infrastructure and regulatory oversight. Concurrently, historic floods in Punjab and urban flooding in Multan expose persistent weaknesses in climate adaptation and disaster management. On the governance front, demands for transparency in the Sindh Public Service Commission and FBR's proposal to publish tax directories reflect growing need for accountability. Internationally, Pakistan's skill-building agreements with China and the SBP's move toward digital currency regulation signal a strategic pivot toward technology-driven economic modernization.

These developments have immediate real-world implications for public sector practitioners and highlight the need to formulate not only short-term responses such as preparing emergency evacuation plans for downstream cities, but also long-term reforms such as in medical regulation, governance reforms and more international partnerships like CPEC's training programs for skills development and economic diversification.

Key policy nuggets emphasize practical steps in addressing wheat price surges through improved procurement and storage, expanding women's participation in IT via specialized tech parks and enhancing maternal and child health support in rural Sindh. In summary, effective policymaking in today's context requires balancing emergency response with structural reform, leveraging both domestic initiatives and international collaborations for a better future.

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## Drive to vaccinate 8.9m children against polio across Sindh begins



A week-long anti-polio campaign has begun across Sindh with the aim to vaccinate 8.9 million children under five between September 1 and 7. Over 70,000 frontline workers will go door-to-door and around 20,000 law enforcement personnel have been deployed to support safe and secure operations across the province. Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal and Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho both have urged the parents to get their children vaccinated for polio.

### Analysis

This campaign demonstrates renewed urgency in combating polio amidst persistent vaccine hesitancy and refusal, especially in urban Karachi. However, its success hinges on mobilizing trust within communities and ensuring broad-based collaboration.

### Way Forward

- Mobilize local religious leaders, teachers, and influencers in Karachi's high-refusal areas like Gujjo to publicly endorse vaccination.
- Launch environmental surveillance (e.g., testing sewage samples) after the campaign to validate coverage and detect gaps.
- Use mobile audio messages, SMS reminders, and short dramas in local languages that stress polio's irreversible risks and the safety of the vaccine.

## Children among 300 affected by HIV in Taunsa



According to the Joint Mission Report on the Paediatric HIV Surge in Taunsa, nearly 300 children, between the ages of 1 and 10 years, in Taunsa, DG Khan, have tested HIV positive due to unsafe blood transfusions, injections, and poor medical practices, exposing severe regulatory and healthcare failures.

### Analysis

The outbreak reflects systemic negligence, weak oversight of blood safety, and rampant quackery, demanding urgent reforms in healthcare regulation, surveillance, and maternal-child health management.

### Way Forward

- Enforce strict screening of all blood transfusions and ensure proper licensing of blood banks to prevent the circulation of unscreened blood bags.
- Ban unnecessary transfusions, reduce irrational use of injections, and strictly monitor doctors and private clinics for compliance with infection-control protocols.
- Expand HIV testing campaigns, especially in high-risk areas, and raise awareness about safe healthcare practices among families.

## Floods threaten Pak economy



Historic floods in Punjab have devastated crops, livestock, and homes, displacing millions and threatening Pakistan's agriculture-driven economy with soaring food prices and export losses. Farmers and experts have warned that the cost of recovery will run into billions of rupees to rebuild homes and re-establish farms.

### Analysis

The disaster exposes Pakistan's economic fragility, as farm destruction risks fueling inflation, deepening food insecurity, and undermining key export sectors like rice and textiles.

### Way Forward

- Reinforce river embankments, expand drainage systems, and modernize dams to reduce flood risks.
- Mobilize global climate finance and technical assistance to aid recovery and build long-term resilience.
- Invest in flood-resistant seed varieties, modern irrigation, and crop insurance schemes to safeguard future harvests.

## Transparency, zero political interference demanded in SPSC



A conference organized by the Sindh United Thinkers Forum at the Pak-American Culture Centre in Karachi criticized the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) for lack of transparency and political interference, demanding reforms such as independent oversight, disclosure of exam records, and merit-based appointments.

### Analysis

The demands reflect deep public distrust in SPSC, highlighting how compromised recruitment undermines meritocracy, fuels corruption, and weakens both governance and education in Sindh.

### Way Forward

- Establish a third-party verification and grievance redressal mechanism to handle complaints fairly.
- Invest in education and human resource development so that qualified candidates can compete effectively.
- Select SPSC chairman and members through open competition and advertisement instead of political nominations.

## WHO warns of global mental health crisis



WHO reports reveal that over 1 billion people live with mental health disorders, with economic losses of \$1 trillion annually and suicide causing 1 in 100 deaths, while global investment in mental health remains critically low.

### Analysis

The crisis underscores a glaring gap between rising mental health needs and inadequate funding, highlighting the urgent necessity for governments to treat mental healthcare as a basic right and scale up community-based, accessible services worldwide.

### Way Forward

- Shift from hospital-centered models to community-based services that are accessible, affordable, and stigma-free.
- Scale up evidence-based prevention programmes, crisis helplines, and early intervention strategies to meet SDG targets.
- Train and deploy more mental health professionals, particularly in low- and middle-income countries facing extreme shortages.

## Kalabagh proposal finds no takers, save for Punjab



KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur's conditional support for the controversial Kalabagh Dam sparked political backlash, with Punjab endorsing the idea but other provinces and his own party rejecting it as divisive.

### Analysis

The debate reflects deep inter-provincial mistrust, where Punjab views dams as a climate and energy necessity, while other provinces see Kalabagh as a threat to federal harmony and resource equity.

### Way Forward

- Strengthen Indus River System Authority (IRSA) and ensure real-time monitoring of water flows so all provinces feel assured about fair allocation.
- Frame water infrastructure within a broader climate resilience plan, emphasizing small dams, canal lining, and efficient irrigation to reduce stress.
- Launch awareness campaigns and consultations with farmers, civil society, and provincial assemblies to build transparency and counter politicization.

## Pakistan, China ink skill-building pacts under CPEC's second phase



According to a press release issued by the government, Pakistan and China are set to sign 11 agreements aimed at launching professional training programmes in Pakistan under CPEC's second phase during the PM's visit at the SCO summit. These programmes include initiatives in e-commerce, software technology, drone applications, agriculture, and medical laboratory sciences; degree programmes in modern fields such as intelligent manufacturing; establishment of training centres such as in smart health, and internationally recognised certifications in key fields such as construction engineering, artificial intelligence.

### Analysis

This skills-focused cooperation marks a strategic pivot in CPEC's second phase—from infrastructure-led to human-capital development—positioning Pakistan to benefit from technology transfer and employment both locally and globally.

### Way Forward

- Tailor programs toward sectors with high export potential to China, such as textiles, agri-goods, and machinery.
- Expand regional access through localized centers to foster equitable access and empowering local youth across Pakistan.
- Leverage instructor and certification pathways to boost local instructor capacity and standardise credentials.

## Digital currency to be legalised once regulation is in place: SBP



SBP Deputy Acting Governor Dr Inayat Hussain, while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, has informed that SBP has agreed in principle to legalise digital currencies once a comprehensive regulatory framework is fully established. Whilst recommending that the Virtual Assets Authority should be placed under the Finance Division instead of the Cabinet Division, the committee deferred the deliberations on the Bill till the next meeting.

### Analysis

This move signals a shift toward mainstreaming virtual assets into Pakistan's financial system and aims to promote innovation and financial inclusion whilst curbing illicit activities through structured oversight.

### Way Forward

- Roll out nationwide education drives for consumers and businesses on the benefits and risks of virtual assets to build knowledge and trust.
- Promote Shariah-compliant fintech innovations to tap into the large Muslim market and drive ethical finance.
- Create regulatory sandboxes under Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority to let startups safely pilot virtual asset solutions, enabling innovation with manageable risk.

## Israel kills 53, claims control over '40pc of Gaza City'



Israeli forces claim to have gained control over 40% of Gaza City, largely through heavy bombardments in neighborhoods like Zeitoun and Sheikh Radwan, resulting in at least 53 deaths on Thursday as civilians were forced to flee. Pope Leo in his meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog discussed the “tragic situation in Gaza” and called for a permanent ceasefire in the Palestinian enclave. Meanwhile, European Commission’s Vice President Teresa Ribera has called the war in Gaza a “genocide”, ramping up criticism of Israel and stated that Europe has failed to take any action to stop it.

### Analysis

This marked escalation signifies a deepening urban offensive toward Gaza City’s core, exacerbating humanitarian suffering amid mass displacement and international criticism. However, there has been no international action to stop Israel from committing genocide.

### Way Forward

- Pakistan should spearhead robust diplomatic efforts in OIC and UN to urge immediate ceasefires and humanitarian corridors into Gaza City.
- Launch targeted relief campaigns via NGOs and diaspora networks to deliver medical aid, food, and shelter to displaced Palestinians in dire need.
- Utilize Pakistani media and civil society platforms to amplify Gaza’s humanitarian crisis.

## FBR will seek govt nod to publish tax directory of lawmakers, all filers



The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) plans to seek government approval to publish the Tax Directory for parliamentarians and all tax filers, resuming the practice after a three-year hiatus. The FBR will go ahead with its name-and-shame policy for those who hide their actual income and evade taxes worth millions of rupees.

### Analysis

This move reflects a commitment to fiscal transparency and could serve as a deterrent against tax evasion, potentially increasing national revenue.

### Way Forward

- Implement a digital platform for real-time tax filing and monitoring to streamline the process and reduce evasion opportunities.
- Enhance public awareness campaigns about the benefits of tax compliance to foster a culture of accountability.
- Establish a dedicated task force to investigate and act upon discrepancies in the newly published Tax Directory to ensure credibility and trust.

## Homage to armed forces, martyrs



President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid solemn tribute to Pakistan’s armed forces and martyrs on the eve of Defence Day, recalling the valor of the 1965 war and Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos, and reaffirming the nation's commitment to sovereignty, peace, and solidarity with Kashmir and Gaza.

### Analysis

This commemoration serves as both a reaffirmation of national unity and a strategic reminder of Pakistan’s military resolve amidst shifting regional tensions, emphasizing a balance between defense readiness and constructive diplomacy.

### Way Forward

- Leverage such commemorations to craft messaging that underscores Pakistan’s preference for peace backed by credible defense capability in regional dialogues.
- Connect Defence Day messaging with international outreach to highlight Pakistan’s support for Kashmir and Palestine is a principled foreign policy.
- Use Defence Day to promote public-private partnerships for indigenous defense production and research & development to reduce reliance on imports and boost self-reliance.

## Multan city at risk as floodwaters enter its tehsil



As floodwaters from the Chenab River inundate low-lying areas of Multan’s Jalalpur Pirwala tehsil, authorities have initiated evacuations and deployed helicopters and rescue boats. Tragically, five individuals drowned when a boat capsized during the evacuation process.

### Analysis

The flood’s severity highlights systemic vulnerabilities in urban flood defenses and emergency response coordination, underscoring the need for improved infrastructure and preparedness.

### Way Forward

- Enhance flood forecasting and early warning systems to provide timely alerts and facilitate proactive evacuations.
- Strengthen flood defenses in vulnerable urban areas, including the construction of resilient embankments and flood barriers.
- Improve coordination among rescue agencies and ensure the availability of adequate equipment, such as boats and helicopters, for swift evacuations during emergencies.

# Policy Nuggets

## 1 BISP, BBSHRRDB sign MoU for skills training

### Impact

Enhances employability of vulnerable groups and promotes sustainable livelihoods.

### Recommendation

Expand vocational training under Benazir Hunarmand Programme; and link trainees with microfinance, entrepreneurship schemes, and private sector opportunities.

*“Education and skills are the most powerful weapons for transforming society.” – Nelson Mandela*

## 4 Pakistan’s first Women’s Software Technology Park launched in AJK

### Impact

Boosts women’s participation in IT, creates jobs, and fosters digital entrepreneurship in underserved regions.

### Recommendation

Expand women-exclusive tech parks nationwide; integrate with freelancing hubs and export platforms; and provide mentorship, training, and global market access to women-led startups.

*“When women are empowered, societies become stronger and more prosperous.” – Michelle Bachelet*

## 7 Sindh expands maternal & child support to 22 districts

### Impact

Improves maternal and child health outcomes, reduces mortality rates, and empowers rural women through conditional cash transfers.

### Recommendation

Ensure transparent targeting of beneficiaries; strengthen healthcare infrastructure; integrate nutrition and awareness campaigns; and scale up programme to achieve universal maternal health coverage.

*“No society can prosper without ensuring the health and rights of its mothers and children.” – Gro Harlem Brundtland*

## 2 Xi, Putin call for new SCO order

### Impact

Strengthens multilateralism, challenges dollar dominance, and redefines Eurasian security.

### Recommendation

Establish SCO Development Bank; expand local currency settlements; and initiate structured dialogue for South Asian peace and conflict resolution.

*“The strength of nations lies in cooperation, not domination.” – John F. Kennedy*

## 5 FIA cracks down on Hawala networks, human trafficking

### Impact

Disrupts illegal financial flows, curbs human trafficking, and strengthens financial transparency.

### Recommendation

Enhance cross-border intelligence sharing; tighten monitoring of informal financial channels; strengthen penalties against trafficking networks; and expand digital banking access to reduce reliance on Hawala.

*“Organized crime and terrorism feed on illicit financial flows cutting them off is key to global security.” – Antonio Guterres*

## 8 Wapda seeks Rs364.8bn hydropower tariff for FY26

### Impact

Raises concerns over power affordability, fiscal sustainability, and public acceptance amid rising energy costs.

### Recommendation

Ensure transparent cost audits; balance tariff hikes with consumer protection; accelerate efficiency upgrades in ageing plants; and expand renewable mix to reduce long-term dependence on tariff escalations.

*“Energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability.” – Ban Ki-moon*

## 3 Wheat crisis triggers flour price surge in Sindh

### Impact

Exacerbates food inflation, burdens households, and undermines farmer confidence.

### Recommendation

Strengthen government procurement and storage; curb hoarding through strict regulation; diversify poultry feed sources; and incentivize wheat cultivation with fair pricing policies.

*“Hunger is not an issue of charity, it is an issue of justice.” – Jacques Diouf*

## 6 Experts warn of deforestation–climate security crisis in KP

### Impact

Accelerates climate vulnerability, worsens floods, erodes ecosystems, and threatens food security.

### Recommendation

Strengthen autonomy of forest institutions; enforce anti-logging laws; expand community-led conservation; and integrate forest management with climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

*“The environment is where we all meet; it is the one thing all of us share.” – Lady Bird Johnson*

## 9 Terror attacks hit Quetta rally and Kech convoy

### Impact

Undermines political stability, escalates insecurity in Balochistan, and threatens civilian and security personnel alike.

### Recommendation

Strengthen intelligence coordination and border security; enhance protection at political gatherings; and expand community policing and counter-extremism programs to curb militant networks.

*“We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail in the fight against terror.” – George W. Bush*



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