



Weekly



# POLICY PULSE

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# OVERVIEW



This week's *Policy Pulse* highlights key developments across Pakistan's governance, economy, and international affairs, reflecting the government's ongoing efforts to strengthen institutions, promote inclusivity, and enhance resilience. Pakistan and UNICEF have agreed to expand cooperation on sustainable development, particularly in child welfare and girls' education, signaling a joint commitment to tackle challenges such as climate change and population growth. Similarly, the national initiative to standardize Pakistan Sign Language marks a milestone in promoting inclusivity and accessibility for the deaf community, ensuring equal opportunities in education and employment.

On the socio-economic front, the Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned that floods in Punjab and KP have damaged over 1.3 million hectares of land, threatening Rabi cultivation and livestock nutrition. The Ministry of Finance anticipates that these floods will cause temporary inflationary pressure, although overall economic indicators remain stable due to strong remittance inflows and robust manufacturing growth. Meanwhile, cardiologists have sounded the alarm over a sharp rise in heart disease among young Pakistanis, driven by smoking, poor diets, and lack of physical activity, calling for urgent public health awareness and preventive care.

In the security domain, Pakistan successfully test-fired the indigenously developed Fatah-4 cruise missile, strengthening its defense capabilities, while security forces neutralized multiple militants in Balochistan, demonstrating improved coordination against terrorism. Diplomatically, Pakistan maintained a balanced stance amid evolving Gaza peace discussions, advocating for Palestinian rights and Muslim unity in multilateral forums.

Policy Nuggets highlight the government's economic strategy focuses on enhancing institutional frameworks for poverty alleviation, by strengthening BISP and Bait-ul-Maal, while simultaneously ensuring fiscal stability and protecting consumers by ruling out a disruptive mini-budget. The telemedicine initiative expands healthcare access to underserved areas, and the "Connected Classrooms" project aims to bridge educational disparities through digital innovation. Together, these measures reflect Pakistan's commitment to building capable institutions, inclusive policies, and technology-driven growth for sustainable national development.

**Pakistan is advancing institutional reform, inclusivity, and resilience through strategic partnerships, technological innovation, and targeted policy actions across governance, economy, and social sectors.**

# GOVERNANCE

## U nicef pledges cooperation for sustainable uplift



Pakistan and UNICEF agreed to deepen cooperation for sustainable development, focusing on challenges like climate change and population growth. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb highlighted the need for coordinated interventions, technical support, and federal-provincial collaboration. UNICEF pledged continued work on child care and girls' education as priority areas.

### Analysis:

This partnership reflects Pakistan's recognition of demographic and climate pressures as urgent development hurdles. By aligning with UNICEF's expertise in child welfare and education, Pakistan can strengthen its social sector resilience. However, success will depend on effective intergovernmental coordination and sustained implementation.

### Way Forward:

- Ensure smooth collaboration between national and provincial governments for effective project implementation.
- Develop a joint road-map to target high priority areas with measurable results.
- Integrate UNICEF's expertise into Pakistan's SDG strategies, particularly in health, education, and social protection.

## T alks resume after deadly AJK unrest



After several days of violent protests in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) that left at least 10 dead and many injured, the federal government dispatched an eight-member high-level committee to Muzaffarabad to resume talks with the protesting Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC). The protesters are demanding the removal of elite privileges, scrapping of reserved refugee seats, implementation of past court rulings on power projects, provisions of health cards and accountability for alleged police firings.

### Analysis:

The government appears to be seeking to de-escalate the situation through negotiation recognizing the need of dialogue to avoid fuelling further unrest. However, success hinges on whether the government offers credible concessions and holds law enforcement accountable or merely delays further conflict.

### Way Forward:

- The government should immediately suspend and investigate officials implicated in the violence and transparently share findings to restore trust.
- The government should commit to clear, measurable actions with timelines, so the protesters see progress.
- Engage local leaders in dialogue from all AJK districts in talks to ensure solutions reflect local voices and reduce the sense of top-down imposition.

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

## Food and Agriculture Organisation warns floods in Punjab, KP will affect Rabi cultivation



Pakistan's top 18 banks, led by the Pakistan Banks' Assos in Punjab and KP have damaged over 1.3 million hectares of land, threatening Rabi cultivation, seed availability, and livestock nutrition. FAO warns of rising disease risks like lumpy skin disease and foot-and-mouth due to overcrowded shelters and fodder shortages. PDMA has ordered surveys to prioritize public complaints, while the Met Office forecasts more rains in Sindh.

### Analysis:

The floods pose a dual challenge immediate food insecurity from crop loss and long-term risks to seed and livestock sustainability. Market pressures may worsen seed shortages, while unchecked animal diseases could deepen rural poverty. Coordinated state action on seed distribution, livestock vaccination, and farmer support is critical to prevent a cascading agricultural crisis.

### Way Forward:

- Ensure timely distribution of certified wheat and fodder seeds at subsidized rates to prevent shortages and stabilize prices.
- Launch urgent vaccination campaigns against lumpy skin disease, foot-and-mouth, and other zoonotic infections in flood-affected districts.
- Provide direct financial aid, crop compensation, and low-interest loans to affected farmers for recovery and Rabi sowing.

## Govt expects floods will worsen inflation



The Ministry of Finance warned that 2025 floods may temporarily push inflation to 3.5-4.5% in September due to supply chain disruptions, though overall economic activity remains stable. Large-scale manufacturing showed strong growth, fiscal discipline improved with a primary surplus, and remittances supported external stability despite rising imports. The government declared climate and agriculture emergencies while maintaining a trajectory of stabilisation and growth.

### Analysis:

Pakistan's economy shows resilience, balancing flood-related inflationary pressures with industrial recovery, fiscal prudence, and strong remittance inflows. However, heavy reliance on agriculture makes climate shocks a persistent threat. Long-term stability will require climate-smart policies, structural reforms, and sustainable resource mobilisation.

### Way Forward:

- Invest in flood-resistant crops, modern irrigation, and livestock protection to reduce future supply shocks.
- Continue prudent expenditure management and effective revenue mobilisation to sustain low fiscal deficit and primary surplus.
- Encourage manufacturing diversification, especially in textiles, pharmaceuticals, and mineral products, to offset agricultural disruptions.

# HEALTH AND EDUCATION

## Poor diet, smoking and inactivity trigger alarming rise in heart disease



Cardiologists in Islamabad warn of a sharp rise in heart disease among Pakistan's youth, driven by smoking, poor diet, inactivity, and uncontrolled conditions like diabetes and hypertension. Experts stressed prevention through lifestyle changes, awareness of heart attack symptoms, and timely medical care, noting that related deaths in Pakistan have doubled in three decades. Shifa International Hospital marked World Heart Day with awareness campaigns and reaffirmed its commitment to advanced cardiac treatment.

### Analysis:

The alarming rise of heart disease in young Pakistanis reflects both poor lifestyle habits and a lack of preventive healthcare culture. Without urgent investment in public awareness and preventive policies, Pakistan faces a potential epidemic of cardiovascular illness among its working-age population.

### Way Forward:

- Encourage routine heart screenings, blood pressure, and diabetes monitoring to identify risks before they become life-threatening.
- Expand access to 24/7 cardiac emergency services and timely interventions like primary PCI across Pakistan.
- Urge policymakers to prioritize heart health through stricter tobacco control, nutrition policies, and promotion of community fitness facilities.

## Govt launches initiative to standardise sign language



Pakistan launched a national initiative to standardize Pakistan Sign Language (PSL), aiming to improve access to education, employment, and public services for the deaf community. The framework includes interpreter certification, integration into schools, media, and government services, and recognition of PSL as a language of rights and identity. DGSE reforms, supported by UNICEF and civil society, are also advancing inclusive education and disability support nationwide.

### Analysis:

Standardizing PSL marks a historic step toward inclusivity, giving the deaf community equal opportunities and cultural recognition. By linking language with rights and empowerment, the initiative strengthens social equity. Its success, however, will hinge on timely implementation, interpreter training, and sustained government-community collaboration.

### Way Forward:

- Expand fiberisation, submarine cable capacity, and digital infrastructure.
- Finalise a unified curriculum and interpreter certification system to ensure consistent use of PSL nationwide.
- Introduce PSL in school curricula and teacher training programs to enable inclusive learning environments.
- Empower the National PSL Task Force to set clear timelines, track progress, and report outcomes transparently.

# SECURITY AND LAW & ORDER

## Pakistan test-fires indigenously built Fatah-4 cruise missile



Pakistan successfully test-fired its indigenously developed Fatah-4 ground-launched cruise missile with a 750 km range. The missile features advanced avionics, terrain-hugging capabilities, and precision targeting, strengthening the Army Rocket Force's conventional arsenal. National leadership congratulated the armed forces, scientists, and engineers on the achievement.

### Analysis:

The Fatah-4 test underscores Pakistan's growing self-reliance in advanced defense technology and enhances its conventional deterrence capability. Its precision and ability to evade defenses bolster strategic stability in the region. However, it also highlights the continuing South Asian arms race, necessitating balanced diplomacy alongside military advancement.

### Way Forward:

- Expand resources and incentives for local defense scientists to sustain innovation and technological growth.
- Leverage defense achievements to strengthen strategic ties with allies and enhance Pakistan's global defense image.
- Pair advancements in missile capabilities with confidence-building measures and diplomatic engagement to avoid escalation.

## 21 terrorists killed, 4 held in Balochistan



Security forces in Balochistan's Quetta, Sherani, and Kech districts launched coordinated operations following intelligence inputs, resulting in the killing of 21 suspected terrorists and the arrest of four others disguised as women. Weapons, ammunition, and explosives were seized from militant hideouts, and authorities said the militants belonged to outlawed outfits Fitna al Khwarij and Fitna al Hindustan (aliases for TTP and Baloch separatist groups).

### Analysis:

The operations signal an aggressive counterterror approach by the government to targeting multiple militant groups simultaneously. Sustained intelligence, regional cooperation, and efforts at socio-economic development in restive areas will be essential for long-term stability.

### Way Forward:

- Strengthen local intelligence networks in Balochistan to detect militant planning early before large camps form.
- Enhance border security coordination with neighboring regions to disrupt militant movement, logistics, and external sponsorships.
- Invest in development, education, and livelihood programs in tribal and under-served districts of Balochistan to undercut militant recruitment.

# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## Trump leans on Israel to okay Gaza peace plan



Trump unveiled a 20-point Gaza peace plan with Israeli withdrawal, Gaza demilitarisation, and an International Stabilisation Force, backed by Muslim states including Pakistan. The plan excludes Hamas from governance, envisions a technocrat-led transitional authority overseen by a "Board of Peace," and includes World Bank support. Netanyahu cautiously endorsed the deal, while Hamas reviews it via Qatar and Egypt.

### Analysis:

The plan reflects Trump's bid to frame himself as a regional peacemaker by leveraging Arab-Muslim backing, but challenges remain in Hamas' response, Netanyahu's resistance to Palestinian statehood, and the practicality of enforcing demilitarisation. Its success hinges on sustained cooperation between Israel, Arab states, and international actors, making implementation more complex than the announcement.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should work closely with other Muslim-majority countries to ensure that the demilitarisation and reconstruction of Gaza according to Palestinian aspirations.
- Pakistan should use this momentum to push the OIC towards a unified stance on Palestine, enhancing its leadership role in the Muslim world.
- Pakistan must consistently press for the recognition of Palestinian statehood with East Jerusalem as its capital to ensure long-term justice.

## Pakistan, India trade barbs after Asia Cup trophy debacle



The Asia Cup ended in controversy after India refused to accept the trophy from ACC chief and Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, sparking a war of words between players, politicians, and officials. India accused Naqvi of mishandling the ceremony, while Pakistan condemned the refusal as "disrespecting cricket." The incident escalated into political barbs, with leaders from both sides framing the episode in nationalistic and militaristic terms.

### Analysis:

The trophy row highlights how cricket remains hostage to Indo-Pak political tensions, with symbolic gestures overshadowing the sport itself. India's refusal and Pakistan's strong response deepened mistrust, showing how even sports diplomacy is collapsing under nationalist rhetoric. Unless depoliticised, such episodes risk eroding cricket's role as a rare platform for people-to-people engagement between the two rivals.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should emphasize that sports must remain separate from politics to reinforce that its a promoter of fair play and sportsmanship.
- By showing restraint and professionalism, Pakistan can win international goodwill while exposing India's politicisation of cricket.
- Islamabad must raise the highlight India's conduct as a breach of cricketing norms at the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and ICC.

# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## Pakistan wavers after Gaza deal draft 'changed'



Pakistan distanced itself from Trump's unveiled Gaza peace plan after last-minute changes, with FM Ishaq Dar stressing that Islamabad only owns the joint Muslim bloc statement. Reports suggest Netanyahu altered key provisions, tying Israel's withdrawal to Hamas' disarmament and giving Israel veto power, angering several Arab states. While Trump gave Hamas three to four days to respond, insiders indicate the group will likely reject the deal as biased.

### Analysis:

The episode shows Pakistan's cautious balancing supporting Muslim unity while resisting unilateral US-Israeli revisions that undermine Palestinian interests. Netanyahu's intervention reveals Israel's leverage in shaping outcomes, reducing trust in the plan's neutrality. Without genuine inclusion of Palestinian concerns, the deal risks collapse, reinforcing divisions rather than paving a credible path to peace.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should push for any peace framework to be endorsed under UN auspices, preventing backroom alterations that tilt the deal in Israel's favor.
- Pakistan should diplomatically but firmly oppose Netanyahu-led alterations that give Israel veto power and delay withdrawal, as they weaken Palestinian sovereignty.
- Pakistan should insist that aid delivery, return of displaced Palestinians, and reconstruction are treated as non-negotiable elements in any settlement.

## India plans mega dam to counter China water fears



India plans a massive dam in Arunachal Pradesh to counter China's \$167 billion Yarlung Tsangpo hydropower project, which New Delhi fears could be used as a "water weapon." Beijing denies any harmful intent, but Indian officials see the dam as a national security necessity, while local Adi tribes fiercely oppose it, fearing cultural destruction. The project could also generate 11,600 MW, reducing India's coal reliance.

### Analysis:

The dam reflects India's growing securitisation of water amid strategic rivalry with China, where hydropower becomes a geopolitical tool in disputed borderlands. While it may enhance India's energy security and deterrence, it risks worsening local resistance, environmental damage, and escalation of Sino-Indian tensions over shared rivers.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan may highlight parallels between India's dam-building in disputed areas to underscore latter's tendency to unilaterally exploit contested resources.
- Pakistan should propose multilateral dialogue involving South Asian states and China to prevent weaponisation of water.
- Pakistan should raise global awareness that building large-scale dam in the Himalayan ecosystem threatens ecological stability and downstream communities across South Asia.

# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## Despite misgivings, Muslim bloc ‘may still support’ Trump’s Gaza plan



Even though many Muslim-majority countries have serious reservations about the latest US peace proposal for Gaza — particularly over issues like troop deployment, governance structure, and Israel’s military presence — they may still lend tacit support given the perceived strategic gains and concessions in the draft. While the plan diverges in key ways from earlier versions endorsed by Muslim states, some governments see opportunities that make conditional backing attractive.

### Analysis:

This reflects the tension between principle and pragmatism in foreign policy: states publicly express misgivings to retain moral credibility, yet privately weigh strategic, economic, and political benefits. The design of such a plan — with ambiguity around enforcement, mandates, and legal legitimacy — gives these states leverage to influence it or distance themselves later.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should clearly say that any peace plan must protect Palestinian rights and stop Israeli control.
- Pakistan should push for the UN, not just the US or Israel, to lead and monitor any peace plan.
- Pakistan can offer to send workers, doctors, or aid to help rebuild Gaza and support its people.

## Trump tells Israel: stop bombing Gaza, Hamas is ready for peace



Trump has called on Israel to halt its bombing in Gaza, asserting that Hamas is “ready for peace,” citing a response by Hamas via mediators accepting parts of his 20-point peace plan. Hamas, however, has expressed reservations stating that the plan is vague and lacks clarity and says further negotiation is needed.

### Analysis:

Trump’s framing attempts to shift pressure onto Israel and depict Hamas as willing participants in peace, but the substantive gaps and ambiguities in the plan, especially over arms and governance, make actual agreement fragile. The move could also be a diplomatic strategy to gain leverage, rather than a serious offer likely to resolve core conflicts.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should call for an immediate ceasefire and suspension of further bombing to prevent more civilian suffering.
- Pakistan should push for mediation by neutral parties to ensure fair dialogue and avoid biased pressure.
- Pakistan should insist that any peace terms ensure safe access for humanitarian aid, medical relief, and reconstruction for Palestinian.

# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**T**rump says Israel has agreed to ‘initial withdrawal line’ in Gaza



Trump claimed that Israel has agreed to an “initial withdrawal line” inside Gaza, and that once Hamas confirms this, a ceasefire, hostages-prisoner swap, and further withdrawal steps will follow. The map he posted suggests Israeli forces would still control much of Gaza even after this “initial” pullback.

### Analysis:

This announcement could be a strategic move to frame Israel as making concessions while putting pressure on Hamas to accept terms, even though the map indicates limited actual withdrawal. The ambiguity in what constitutes “initial withdrawal” gives room for maneuvering but also risk of renewed conflict if expectations are unmet.

### Way Forward:

- Pakistan should insist that any withdrawal be clearly defined and monitored by independent observers.
- Pakistan should call for neutral third parties to verify Israel’s actions to ensure compliance.
- Pakistan should withhold full support until concrete, credible steps by Israel are taken on the ground.

**P**M Shehbaz receives guard of honour in Malaysia ahead of delegation-level talks



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was accorded a formal guard of honour by Malaysian authorities upon his arrival in Kuala Lumpur, ahead of a delegation-level dialogue with Malaysia’s leadership. Both the leaders are expected to deliberate on enhancing cooperation in trade, IT & telecom, halal industry, education, infrastructure, investment, energy, digital economy, and people-to-people ties. The discussion will also include key regional and global developments.

### Analysis:

The ceremonial reception underscores the diplomatic goodwill and importance Malaysia places on its relationship with Pakistan. Moreover, talks over trade, investment, energy, halal industry etc. showcase a potential of expanding cooperation in areas which are mutually beneficial to both the countries.

### Way Forward:

- Prioritize export of halal meats and agricultural products to Malaysia, leveraging the halal industry focus to reduce trade imbalance.
- Propose technology transfer agreements in IT/digital economy, including joint startups or incubation in Pakistan with Malaysian partners.
- Strengthen people-to-people and educational exchanges, e.g. scholarships, student exchanges and mutual recognition of qualifications, to deepen long-term ties.

# POLICY NUGGETS

## 1 Govt resumes talks to settle Rs565bn power sector dues

### Impact

Stabilizes Pakistan's energy sector by reducing circular debt and restoring investor confidence in CPEC and renewable IPPs.

### Recommendation

Pursue transparent renegotiations with Chinese coal and renewable IPPs; prioritize waiver of late payment interest; enforce fiscal discipline and conduct forensic audits for non-compliant firms to ensure sustainable power sector reform.

"Good governance never depends upon laws, but upon the personal qualities of those who govern" – Frank Herbert

## 4 Ten martyred as security forces foil Quetta terror attack

### Impact

Demonstrates security forces' vigilance in preventing a major catastrophe, highlighting persistent terror threats and the need for stronger counterterrorism coordination.

### Recommendation

Enhance urban security surveillance; strengthen inter-agency intelligence sharing; accelerate implementation of the National Action Plan; and expand community policing to prevent infiltration and radicalisation at local levels.

"With guns you can kill terrorists, with education you can kill terrorism." – Malala Yousafzai

## 7 Trade deficit widens 46pc to \$3.3bn

### Impact

Pakistan's trade deficit jumped 46pc in September to \$3.3bn as imports rose and exports fell, heightening pressure on reserves and currency stability.

### Recommendation

Promote export diversification, curb non-essential imports, and support value-added industries to reduce external vulnerability.

"Globalization and free trade do spur economic growth, and they lead to lower prices on many goods." – Robert Reich

## 2 Suparco integrates space-based tools for disaster preparedness

### Impact

Transforms Pakistan's disaster response from reactive to proactive, enhancing early warning and resilience.

### Recommendation

Expand satellite data applications for national risk mapping; strengthen collaboration with global space agencies; integrate geospatial analytics into federal and provincial disaster management frameworks.

"We cannot stop natural disasters, but we can arm ourselves with knowledge." – Petra Nemcova

## 5 Govt to expand healthcare access through telemedicine

### Impact

Enhances healthcare equity by connecting remote and underserved communities to quality medical services, while promoting digital transformation in Pakistan's health sector.

### Recommendation

Accelerate telemedicine infrastructure rollout; integrate universal medical records nationwide; and strengthen preventive healthcare through clean water initiatives and public awareness campaigns for sustainable health outcomes.

"Health is a human right, not a privilege to be purchased." – Gro Harlem Brundtland

## 8 Senate seeks stronger capacity for BISP and Bait-ul-Maal

### Impact

Aims to strengthen Pakistan's social protection framework by improving institutional capacity and ensuring efficient service delivery for poverty alleviation.

### Recommendation

Finance Ministry should lift hiring restrictions; allocate adequate funds for skilled recruitment in BISP and Bait-ul-Maal; and promote institutional continuity through capacity-building and retention of permanent staff.

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice." – Nelson Mandela

## 3 PIA restructuring boosts profitability amid open sky review

### Impact

Revives Pakistan's national carrier through governance reforms, debt restructuring, and route expansion, strengthening aviation competitiveness ahead of privatisation.

### Recommendation

Ensure transparent privatisation with credible bidders; maintain fiscal discipline through PIA Holding Company; pursue strategic bilateral air agreements while safeguarding national interests under a calibrated open sky policy.

"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new." – Socrates

## 6 Finance Minister rules out mini-budget amid IMF review

### Impact

Signals fiscal stability and policy continuity, strengthening investor confidence as Pakistan meets IMF targets and advances macroeconomic reforms without additional tax measures.

### Recommendation

Maintain fiscal discipline through efficient revenue collection; operationalise the Tax Policy Unit for evidence-based budgeting; and diversify financing via instruments like Panda Bonds to enhance external market credibility.

"Fiscal discipline can turn the economy around." – Jeff Fortenberry

## 9 Education Ministry Launches 'Connected Classrooms' Initiative

### Impact

The Ministry of Federal Education has launched 'Connected Classrooms' to link 240 FDE schools through real-time digital learning led by expert teachers. The project bridges educational divides, ensuring equal access to quality instruction for students across urban and remote areas.

### Recommendation

Scale up digital infrastructure, train educators in tech-based teaching, and ensure sustained funding to strengthen inclusive and future-ready education.

"Technology will not replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of great teachers can be transformational." – George Couros



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