

Weekly



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CONTENTS

Overview

Governance

Punjab authorities move to tackle e-challan scam

Strategy to curb illegal mining in Balochistan being planned

NJPMC seeks remedy for violations of production law

PIA dispels 'fake news' of crew disappearance in Toronto

Environment

Transport sector emerges as key cause of air pollution

Respiratory infections rise in Karachi amid poor air quality

Socio-Economic Issues

Urgent action needed to confront online violence against women: Sherry

Over 80pc of Pakistanis lack access to safe drinking water: ADB



Contd

PM approves electricity projects for GB, Gwadar

Govt agrees to new IMF targets after missing about a dozen

International Affairs

Trump to sign order blocking AI regulation by states

Flood-hit Indonesia suffers food, medical shortages

Chinese group eyes setting up solar panel plant in Pakistan

China calls on Pakistan, Afghanistan to handle differences through dialogue

US okays sale of tech worth \$686m for Pakistan's F-16s

Turkiye backs stability plan as PM seeks global action to stem terror

Policy Nuggets



OVERVIEW



This week's *Policy Pulse* delivers a timely snapshot of Pakistan's pressing governance challenges and reform efforts, from cybersecurity threats to environmental crises and economic stabilization. Tailored for public sector leaders, it weaves news briefs, sharp analyses, and forward-looking strategies across governance, environment, socio-economics, and international affairs, highlighting the interplay of local vulnerabilities and global shifts in a rapidly changing landscape.

Major insights reveal escalating cyber-fraud via cloned government sites, judicial pushes for detainee protections, Balochistan's mining regularization drive, and transport's dominance in urban air pollution spikes fueling health crises like Karachi's respiratory surge. Analyses stress systemic gaps, weak digital literacy, enforcement lapses, and fragmented water governance leaving 80% without safe drinking water, while IMF renegotiations underscore fiscal strains amid power debt settlements and renewable pushes in Gwadar and Gilgit-Baltistan. International angles cover US F-16 upgrades, Chinese solar investments, and calls for Pak-Afghan dialogue.

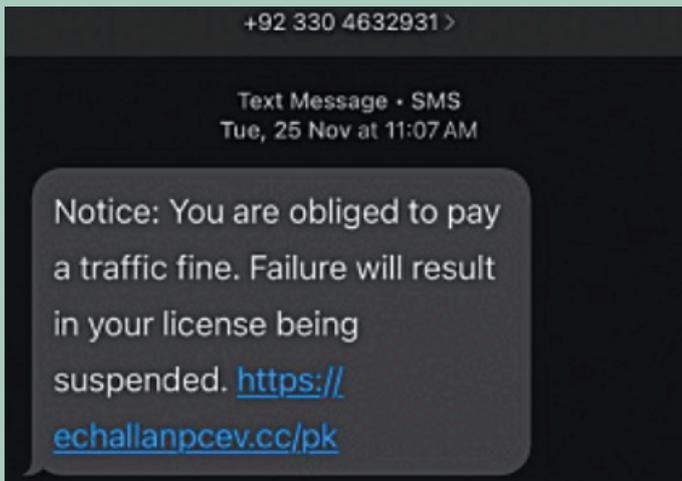
These findings ripple into public sector practice, demanding swift coordination: PSCA-NCCIA cyber task forces to block scams, city-tailored emission controls beyond blanket bans, and federal water authorities to avert health disasters. Judicial e-filing expansions and polio campaigns already cut cases from 74 to 30 in 2025, showing reform traction. However, sustained investment in resilient infrastructure, like Gwadar's solar grids, remains vital amid climate disasters in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

The Policy Nuggets urge tightening car import verification for fiscal discipline; uniform 18-year marriage age nationwide; sustaining Railways' Rs300m daily revenue via digitization; scaling RWU's Rs9m innovation funding; securing Punjab schools post-audit; and enforcing Brazil-style social media rules against terror content. These distill urgent, executable steps for resilient governance. Overall, the *Policy Pulse* equips practitioners with precise, pragmatic tools to navigate Pakistan's multifaceted policy terrain.

Pakistan faces urgent governance challenges and requires coordinated reforms to address cybersecurity threats, environmental and health risks, economic pressures, and institutional weaknesses.

GOVERNANCE

Punjab authorities move to tackle e-challan scam



Punjab's Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) has alerted police and the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) after scammers cloned its website and sent fake e-challan messages to citizens using black-market phone numbers and CNIC data. The fraudulent links mimicked the official portal but directed victims to pay nonexistent fines. PSCA stressed that legitimate e-challans only come from short code 8070 and the .gov.pk domain. A public awareness campaign is underway as authorities work to trace the network behind the scam.

Analysis:

The incident highlights growing cyber-fraud sophistication, with attackers exploiting cloned government sites and illegally sourced personal data to appear credible. Weak SIM/CNIC controls and widespread digital illiteracy increase vulnerability. Punjab's Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) swift public warnings are a necessary defensive step, but long-term mitigation requires stronger digital security, tighter regulation of mobile registrations, and quicker law-enforcement coordination against phishing networks.

Way Forward:

- Accelerate cyber investigations by enabling faster coordination between PSCA, Punjab Police, and NCCIA to trace cloned websites and block phishing domains promptly.
- Deploy stronger cybersecurity protections such as anti-phishing monitoring systems and automated alerts to detect fake PSCA pages in real time.
- Establish stricter penalties for digital impersonation of government platforms to deter future scams.

Strategy to curb illegal mining in Balochistan being planned



Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti announced a comprehensive strategy to curb illegal mining, protect mineral resources, and ensure transparency in the mining lease system. The government plans to elevate the mining sector to industry status, attract global investment, and establish a Chamber of Mines while prioritizing worker welfare, safety, and modern regulatory standards. Rescue centres in Chamalang and Duki are also being introduced to strengthen emergency response.

Analysis:

The initiative reflects Balochistan's efforts to formalize and regulate its mining sector, enhancing economic stability and investor confidence. By focusing on transparency, international standards, and worker protection, the strategy aims to reduce illegal mining and resource exploitation. Successful implementation could boost employment, attract long-term investment, and strengthen governance in a historically underdeveloped sector.

Way Forward:

- Expedite establishment of Chamber of Mines to facilitate coordination between government and mine owners, streamline operations, and resolve sectoral issues.
- Adopt modern technology and international standards for mining operations, environmental protection, and safety compliance.
- Implement regular audits and evaluations to ensure policy effectiveness, sustainability, and continuous improvement in the mining sector.

GOVERNANCE

N JPMC seeks remedy for violations of production law



At its 56th meeting, the National Judicial Policy-Making Committee (NJPMC) asked the Attorney General of Pakistan to present a mechanism to address violations of the legal requirement that detainees must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours and aims to improve compliance and redress complaints. The committee also reviewed other judicial reforms, including speeding up case disposal and establishing measures like e-filing and improved litigation management.

Analysis:

This move reflects growing judicial focus on strengthening legal safeguards against unlawful detention and enhancing accountability within the justice system, while also pushing broader reforms to improve efficiency and access to justice. However, the effectiveness of these reforms will depend on concrete implementation and coordination between the judiciary and executive.

Way Forward:

- Set up a clear system to ensure all police and security agencies produce detainees before a magistrate within 24 hours every time.
- Create an easy, transparent way for people to report violations of detention rules and ensure fast action on those complaints.
- Expand e-filing and reduce backlog of long-pending cases so courts can work faster and fairly for all citizens.

P IA dispels ‘fake news’ of crew disappearance in Toronto



Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has strongly denied a viral social-media claim that an entire flight crew disappeared in Toronto. In a tweet, it has stated that the report is “fake news” which is being spread by “anti-Pakistan quarters” to damage the airline’s and Pakistan’s reputation. Separately, a PIA spokesperson has also issued a statement denying the news and stated that the information had been circulated by an “Afghan and anti-Pakistan account”.

Analysis:

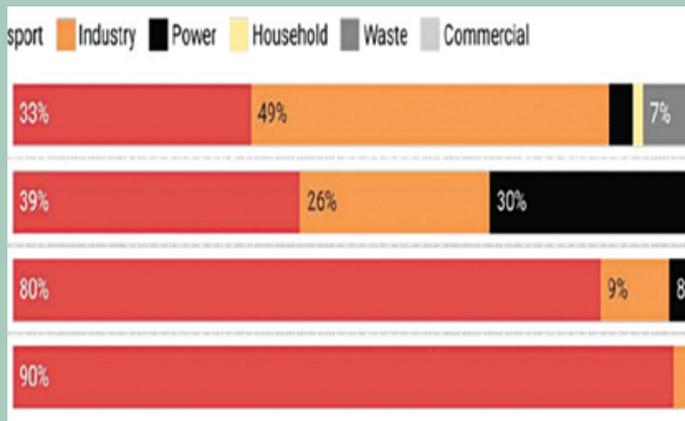
Whilst this specific claim of the entire crew going missing is false, ongoing individual disappearances of PIA staff abroad have fuelled misinformation and harmed the airline’s public image and highlight broader operational and morale issues. Addressing both real workforce concerns and misinformation is essential for restoring confidence in the national carrier.

Way Forward:

- PIA should regularly publish verified updates on crew movements and any legitimate incidents to preempt misinformation and build trust domestically and internationally.
- Improve crew welfare and incentives to reduce motivations for absconding abroad, especially on routes like Toronto.
- PIA can improve its screening for the crew before international trips and require simple service bonds or guarantees for sensitive routes like Canada, so staff are more likely to return and incidents are reduced.

ENVIRONMENT

Transport sector emerges as key cause of air pollution



The Pakistan Air Quality Initiative (PAQI) report highlights that air pollution in major cities including Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad-Rawalpindi, and Peshawar is primarily local and structurally driven, with transport, industry, and brick kilns as major contributors. Lahore faces a mix of transport (35%), industry (28%), and kilns (17%), while Peshawar suffers from valley-trapped pollution dominated by transport (51%). Rural areas and household emissions remain under-researched, and PAQI stresses evidence-based interventions like cleaner fuels and electrifying two- and three-wheelers.

Analysis:

The study underscores that Pakistan's air pollution is heterogeneous and requires city-specific solutions rather than uniform bans. Transport emerges as a key contributor, especially in Islamabad-Rawalpindi and Peshawar, while industrial and port activities dominate in Karachi. Effective mitigation will demand stronger governance, public awareness, and targeted interventions addressing local emission sources, including rural and household pollution, which are often overlooked in current policies.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen governance and enforcement by closing regulatory gaps, monitoring super-emitters, and ensuring compliance with environmental laws.
- Encourage research and data transparency by using satellite data, chemical transport modeling, and real-time monitoring to guide policy interventions.
- Integrate sustainable urban planning to reduce congestion, improve traffic flow, and minimize air pollution trapped by city design and topography.

Respiratory infections rise in Karachi amid poor air quality



Respiratory infections in Karachi have surged this winter as worsening air quality, driven by high levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and other pollutants, weakens lung immunity and increases vulnerability to illnesses like influenza, bronchitis, pneumonia, and interstitial lung disease. Experts warn that pollution levels far exceed WHO and national safe limits and call for urgent government and individual action to protect public health.

Analysis:

The article underscores how environmental degradation directly impacts health, revealing that chronic air pollution is exacerbating respiratory disease burdens on hospitals and clinics, especially during the winter months when pollution spikes. The lack of effective air quality monitoring and pollution control policies highlights systemic gaps in environmental governance in Pakistan.

Way Forward:

- Enforce stricter controls on vehicle and industrial emissions nationwide, especially in major cities to reduce PM2.5 and other harmful pollutants.
- Expand affordable air quality monitoring networks across provinces so authorities can track pollution in real time and issue public health advisories during dangerous smog events.
- Promote public health measures such as encouraging mask use on high-pollution days, increasing urban tree planting, and running awareness campaigns about the health risks of poor air quality.

SOCIO- ECONOMIC ISSUES

Urgent action needed to confront online violence against women: Sherry



Senator Sherry Rehman highlighted the urgent need to address online and offline violence against women in Pakistan, citing over 3,100 complaints of digital abuse last year, with women disproportionately affected. Despite dedicated GBV courts, conviction rates remain low, and stigma prevents most survivors from reporting. Rehman called for stronger laws, gender-sensitive policing, and safer digital ecosystems, while PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto emphasized human rights as central to democracy.

Analysis:

The data underscores a systemic failure to protect women from both digital and physical violence, revealing gaps in enforcement, legislation, and societal attitudes. Effective mitigation requires comprehensive legal frameworks, robust enforcement, public awareness, and technological safeguards. Strengthening these mechanisms can empower women, reduce underreporting, and ensure that human rights protections translate into tangible social change.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen digital protection laws to specifically address online harassment, cyberstalking, and tech-facilitated abuse against women.
- Foster collaboration with civil society and tech companies to create safer digital platforms and implement preventative measures.
- Improve reporting and accountability mechanisms by creating accessible, confidential channels for victims and ensuring timely action on complaints.

Over 80pc of Pakistanis lack access to safe drinking water: ADB



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that over 80% of Pakistanis lack access to safe drinking water, warning that the country needs \$35-42 billion in the next decade to reform its water governance and infrastructure. Despite improved policies since 2017, fragmented implementation, underinvestment, and deteriorating systems have left Pakistan among the world's most water-stressed nations. Falling per-capita water availability, unsafe supplies, and inefficient urban and rural systems are worsening health risks and environmental degradation. The ADB urges massive investment, stronger institutions, and a federal water authority to address the crisis.

Analysis:

Pakistan's water emergency stems not only from scarcity but from governance failures, outdated infrastructure, and weak regulatory oversight. Without coordinated national leadership and sustained financial commitment, climate pressures and population growth will further deepen water insecurity. Establishing a central authority, improving cost recovery, modernizing infrastructure, and enforcing quality standards are critical to prevent a long-term social, economic, and public-health disaster.

Way Forward:

- Establish a federal, autonomous water authority to enforce nationwide standards on water quality, service delivery, and transparency.
- Modernize supply and distribution systems by reducing leakage, improving billing and cost recovery, and encouraging private-sector participation in urban water management.
- Prioritize climate resilience planning, including flood control, groundwater recharge, and environmental restoration to protect rivers and ecosystems.

SOCIO- ECONOMIC ISSUES

P M approves electricity projects for GB, Gwadar



PM Shehbaz Sharif approved major electricity projects for Gilgit-Baltistan and Gwadar, including a 100-MW solar initiative, to ensure reliable and sustainable power. The government also outlined short-, medium-, and long-term measures to stabilise Gwadar's power supply amid rising demand. Separately, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto arrived in Pakistan for a two-day official visit to enhance bilateral cooperation, while the UAE reaffirmed strong ties and future investment prospects in Pakistan.

Analysis:

These energy initiatives signal the government's push for renewable power and regional economic development, particularly in strategic areas like Gwadar and GB. The diplomatic engagements with Indonesia and the UAE further highlight Pakistan's efforts to expand foreign partnerships, attract investment, and strengthen geopolitical ties. Sustained implementation, transparent governance, and timely execution will be critical for these projects to deliver long-term economic gains.

Way Forward:

- Promote regional economic growth by ensuring power standards meet global benchmarks, enabling Gwadar to emerge as a major economic and port hub.
- Leverage international partnerships, including upcoming MoUs with Indonesia and increased UAE investment, to support energy, infrastructure, and economic development initiatives.
- Prioritise grid stability measures, including voltage-improvement plans and short-term solar installations in key government institutions.

G ovt agrees to new IMF targets after missing about a dozen



The government has agreed to 11 new IMF performance targets after missing about the same number of previous fiscal and reform benchmarks in its \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme, enabling the IMF Executive Board to approve a \$1.2 billion disbursement. These revised targets include increased taxes on items like fertilisers and sugary products, shifting goods to a general GST regime, and planned cuts in expenditure if revenue shortfalls persist, along with broader commitments on governance, tax reform, and privatization of power distribution companies.

Analysis:

The latest agreement reflects continuing economic pressure and revenue shortfalls in Pakistan, forcing authorities to renegotiate conditions to stay in the IMF programme, which remains crucial for stabilising reserves and avoiding default. However, frequent missed targets and waivers suggest structural weaknesses in fiscal policy implementation and revenue mobilization that could undermine long-term economic reform.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen tax collection systems by investing in digitalisation, reducing evasion, and broadening the tax base to reliably meet revenue targets and reduce reliance on ad-hoc tax hikes.
- Implement structural reforms in key sectors with clear timelines and transparency to build investor confidence and improve fiscal outcomes.
- Increase government accountability and public communication on IMF conditionality and economic reforms to build trust and ensure social protections are maintained for vulnerable groups during fiscal adjustments.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

T rump to sign order blocking AI regulation by states



President Donald Trump announced he will sign an executive order to block US states from independently regulating artificial intelligence, arguing a single national framework is essential to maintain American leadership in AI. The move comes despite resistance in Congress and concerns within his own MAGA base, where many fear AI's economic and social impacts. The order is expected to face political pushback and legal challenges, especially as earlier attempts to override state laws were rejected. Tech leaders like David Sacks, Sam Altman, and Jensen Huang support the push for centralized regulation.

Analysis:

Trump's plan reflects a broader struggle between federal control and states' rights in governing rapidly evolving technologies. Centralising AI regulation could streamline innovation but risks alienating political allies and escalating constitutional battles over federal overreach. Support from major tech firms shows industry preference for unified rules, yet public anxiety about job displacement and Big Tech influence may deepen political fractures. The ultimate impact will depend on legal viability and whether national standards address both innovation and public safety.

Way Forward:

- Pakistan should prepare for shifts in global AI competitiveness, as a more centralised and aggressive US approach could influence geopolitical dynamics.
- Ensure balanced regulation, crafting policies that support innovation while protecting citizens from AI misuse, bias, privacy violations, and economic disruption.
- Develop regional cooperation mechanisms, particularly with China, GCC states, and ASEAN, to diversify AI partnerships as global regulatory directions shift under US policy changes.

F lood-hit Indonesia suffers food, medical shortages



Severe floods and monsoon rains have devastated Indonesia and Sri Lanka, killing 961 and 635 people respectively, displacing over a million in Indonesia, and causing massive infrastructure damage. Shortages of food, medicine, and basic supplies are reported, while authorities in both countries are deploying troops and innovative solutions, like elephants in Aceh, for rescue and debris clearance. Recovery costs are projected in billions, and governments are appealing for international assistance.

Analysis:

The disasters highlight the escalating human and economic costs of climate change in South and Southeast Asia, where extreme weather is becoming more frequent and intense. Weak infrastructure, inadequate disaster preparedness, and resource shortages exacerbate the crisis. Effective long-term strategies including resilient infrastructure, early warning systems, and international support are critical to reduce vulnerability and improve emergency response.

Way Forward:

- Improve early warning and forecasting systems to provide timely alerts for floods, landslides, and cyclones, reducing loss of life.
- Invest in resilient infrastructure, including flood-resistant housing, roads, bridges, and drainage networks to withstand extreme weather events.
- Enhance emergency response capacity by training rescue personnel, pre-positioning medical and relief supplies, and establishing rapid-response teams.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Chinese group eyes setting up solar panel plant in Pakistan



China's Hebei Juhang Energy Technology Group has shown interest in establishing a large-scale solar panel manufacturing plant in Pakistan for domestic use and exports. The Board of Investment offered facilitation, including 6,000 acres of land and SEZ incentives, while highlighting Pakistan's improving business environment. The initiative aligns with Pakistan-China economic cooperation, building on \$8.5 billion in joint ventures from recent B2B conferences.

Analysis:

The proposed investment represents a significant step toward Pakistan's renewable energy development and industrial growth, while strengthening bilateral trade ties with China. By focusing on green technology and high-tech sectors, it can create jobs, boost exports, and support sustainable economic growth. Efficient implementation, including feasibility studies and joint-venture agreements, will be critical to maximize the project's economic and environmental benefits.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen Pakistan-China economic cooperation through strategic partnerships and long-term joint ventures in high-tech and renewable energy industries.
- Ensure sustainable development by implementing environmentally friendly manufacturing practices and adhering to international green standards.
- Encourage private-sector participation alongside foreign investment to foster innovation, technology transfer, and industrial diversification.

China calls on Pakistan, Afghanistan to handle differences through dialogue



China urged Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve their recent border tensions through dialogue and consultation, emphasizing de-escalation and regional stability. Spokesperson Guo Jiakun highlighted the importance of cooperation between the two neighboring countries and China's willingness to play a constructive role, alongside the international community, in improving bilateral relations.

Analysis:

The statement reflects China's strategic interest in maintaining peace along its regional periphery and ensuring stability in South and Central Asia. By promoting dialogue, China aims to reduce conflict risks that could affect regional trade, security, and projects like CPEC. Constructive engagement can strengthen diplomatic ties and create a framework for sustained cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Way Forward:

- Communicate domestic commitment to peace by publicly emphasizing Pakistan's willingness to resolve differences diplomatically and uphold regional stability.
- Strengthen diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan through sustained dialogue channels to resolve border and security issues peacefully.
- Develop long-term frameworks for trade and connectivity that encourage cross-border economic cooperation while maintaining security.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

US okays sale of tech worth \$686m for Pakistan's F-16s



According to the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency's (DSCA) letter to Congress, the US has approved a \$686 million sale of advanced technology and support for Pakistan's F-16 fighter jets. The major defence equipment (MDE) component includes 92 Link-16 data link systems and six inert Mk-82 500-lb general purpose bomb bodies which will have no explosive payload and will be used for weapons integration testing. The rest of the deal consists of \$649m worth of non-MDE equipment which includes a system that is used to identify hostile and allied aircraft. According to DSC letter, the updates will provide more "seamless integration and interoperability between the Pakistan Air Force and the US Air Force in combat operations, exercises, and training, and refurbishment will extend the aircraft life through 2040 while addressing critical flight safety concerns".

Analysis:

This deal highlights ongoing defence cooperation between the US and Pakistan, aiming to bolster Pakistan's air capabilities and maintain strategic ties, while the US frames the sale as supporting mutual security objectives and counterterrorism interoperability. However, such military upgrades are likely to attract regional scrutiny, especially from neighbouring countries watching shifts in defence postures.

Way Forward:

- Prioritise training and maintenance programmes domestically to fully absorb and utilise the new systems effectively, maximising capability from the technology transfer.
- Invest in diversified defence partnerships and indigenous platforms to balance reliance on foreign military sales and support long-term self-sufficiency.
- Strengthen oversight and auditing of defence spending to ensure the \$686m upgrade delivers maximum operational value and aligns with national security priorities.

Turkiye backs stability plan as PM seeks global action to stem terror



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed Ankara's willingness to support a mechanism to sustain stability following the extended ceasefire between Pakistan and Afghanistan, during discussions with PM Shehbaz Sharif at an international peace forum in Turkmenistan. PM Shehbaz urged the global community to press the Afghan Taliban to honour commitments to curb terrorism from Afghan soil and highlighted Pakistan's commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and sustainable development. He also thanked regional partners for their role in brokering the ceasefire and emphasized the link between lasting peace and socio-economic progress.

Analysis:

The engagement with Türkiye underscores Pakistan's strategy of leveraging regional partnerships to reinforce a fragile ceasefire and curb cross-border terrorism, while also situating its security concerns within broader diplomatic and development agendas. This approach aims to internationalize pressure on the Afghan Taliban but risks prolonging dependency on external mediation without concrete enforcement mechanisms.

Way Forward:

- Improve fencing, surveillance, and patrols along the Pak-Afghan border to stop militant movement.
- Keep engaging Türkiye, regional states, and global forums to pressure the Afghan Taliban to act against terrorist groups.
- Invest more in education, jobs, and infrastructure in vulnerable areas to reduce the space for extremism.

POLICY NUGGETS

1 Economic Coordination Committee tightens car import rules, raises OMC margins

Impact

ECC discontinued the Personal Baggage Scheme, tightened vehicle import criteria, and approved OMC margin increases.

Recommendation

Ensure strict verification, digital monitoring, and fiscal discipline to enhance transparency and efficiency.

"Integrity, transparency and accountability are the real pillars of good governance." – Peter Eigen

4 RWU awards Rs9m seed funding at Pitch Fest 2025

Impact

Rawalpindi Women University provided Rs9 million to seven projects, promoting youth innovation.

Recommendation

Strengthen university and industry linkages, expand mentorship and funding pools, and scale such initiatives to promote sustainable innovation and skilled youth employment.

"Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower." – Steve Jobs

7 Punjab schools audit reveals critical security gaps

Impact

Audit finds thousands of Punjab schools lacking basic security measures, leaving students and staff highly vulnerable.

Recommendation

Implement coordinated structural and operational reforms, equip campuses with surveillance and access-control systems, train security personnel, and conduct regular emergency drills.

"Security in schools is not optional; it is foundational to the right to education." – UNESCO

2 Sindh leads call for uniform child marriage age nationwide

Impact

Sindh Assembly advocates for a legal marriage age of 18 to align with child protection laws.

Recommendation

Promote legislative uniformity, ensure enforcement across provinces, and strengthen awareness to safeguard children's rights and welfare.

"Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future." – John F. Kennedy

5 Pakistan settles record Rs659.6bn power debt

Impact

Pakistan settled a historic Rs 659.6 billion debt, enhancing investor confidence and reducing circular debt.

Recommendation

Sustain fiscal discipline, deepen capital market capacity, and accelerate structural reforms to secure long-term energy and economic stability.

"Stability and progress come from the courage to reform and the wisdom to sustain it." – Christine Lagarde

8 Pakistan launches final 2025 nationwide polio campaign

Impact

Polio cases dropped from 74 to 30, yet endemic risks remain in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Recommendation

Mobilise 400,000+ frontline polio workers, ensure full immunisation coverage, engage communities and religious scholars, counter misinformation, and encourage public figures to lead by example.

"Vaccines are the tugboats of preventive health." – William Foege

3 Railways revenue hits record Rs300m daily under reforms

Impact

Pakistan Railways achieved Rs300 million daily revenue, the highest in 30 years, due to reforms.

Recommendation

Sustain reform momentum, prioritise track and station upgrades, and strengthen digital operations for long-term efficiency and profitability.

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

6 Drone strikes kill militants; school destroyed in Waziristan

Impact

Security forces killed eight militants in drone strikes while militants destroyed a school, risking student safety.

Recommendation

Enhance border intelligence operations, secure educational institutions, and strengthen community resilience against extremist violence.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela

9 Pakistan warns social media under 'Brazil-style rules'

Impact

Terrorism-related accounts remain active; platforms show inconsistent content moderation.

Recommendation

Require local offices, AI-based moderation, timely data sharing, and fines or legal action modeled on Brazil.

"The great thing about the internet is that you can say anything you want but you are still responsible for it." – Vint Cerf



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