



Weekly



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OVERVIEW



This week's *Policy Pulse* provides a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's evolving governance, socio-economic management, and foreign policy landscape. It spans institutional integrity, economic revitalization, security challenges, and strategic diplomacy. Together, they reflect a state actively recalibrating its institutions and external engagements to stimulate growth.

The *Policy Pulse* highlights a concerted drive toward institutional reform and digital modernization. The launch of the SHIKRA passport system, and AI-led hiring in Balochistan reflects focus on accountability, transparency, and efficiency. Concurrently, major economic decisions, from privatizing PIA and offering industrial incentives to pursuing mineral cooperation with China, signals a pragmatic push to attract investment and reduced fiscal burdens.

From a real-world perspective, these policy shifts have direct implications for security, prosperity, and public trust. Operations in Balochistan and proposed security cooperation. Meanwhile, developments like the India-EU trade deal and Pakistan's role in the new Gaza Board of Peace necessitates an agile foreign policy to safeguard economic and strategic interests. At home, industrial incentives and digital reforms aim to improve livelihoods, but their success hinges on effective execution and addressing root causes of instability.

The *Policy Nuggets* distill these developments into actionable insights, emphasizing prevention, institutional integrity, and regional connectivity. Whether discussing transparent hiring, ministerial accountability, border health surveillance, or rail corridors, the underlying theme is clear: sustainable progress requires robust systems, forward-looking governance, and cooperative frameworks. Reactive measures are insufficient; building national resilience depends on embedding transparency, foresight, and accountability into the policy fabric.

In conclusion, this week's insights map a nation at a strategic inflection point, diligently working to strengthen its institutional foundations while navigating a turbulent external environment.

Pakistan stands at a strategic inflection point, recalibrating governance, economic policy, security, and diplomacy through institutional reform and pragmatic engagement to drive sustainable growth and resilience.

GOVERNANCE

N A panel moves towards ending bureaucrats' dual nationality



The National Assembly Standing Committee discussed a private bill to ban dual nationality for bureaucrats and possibly judges, with members largely supporting the proposal but deferring final voting. The Establishment Division is drafting rules on foreign nationality for civil servants, pending government and parliamentary decisions. The committee also reviewed issues related to transport monetization, benevolent funds, and administrative oversight, directing stricter compliance and monitoring. Further deliberations and reports will precede a final vote on the bill.

Analysis:

The debate reflects growing concerns about loyalty, national security, and accountability within Pakistan's civil service. Extending restrictions to judges raises constitutional and legal questions about rights and independence of the judiciary. While the proposal aims to strengthen state integrity, it may face legal challenges and policy debates, especially regarding citizens with dual nationality by birth. Overall, the issue highlights tensions between globalization, governance reforms, and national sovereignty.

Way Forward:

- Introduce a transparent and verifiable declaration mechanism for all bureaucrats and judges, with penalties for false disclosure.
- Distinguish between dual nationality acquired by birth and voluntary acquisition, with flexible rules for the former to ensure fairness and constitutional compliance.
- Establish an independent oversight body to monitor compliance and investigate violations within the bureaucracy.

D igital monitoring launched for passport issuance



Pakistan has launched SHIKRA, an advanced digital monitoring and analytics system to oversee passport issuance in real time. The system integrates data analytics, automated printing, a 24/7 monitoring room, and a centralised call centre to improve efficiency, transparency, and service delivery. Authorities claim the new passport infrastructure meets ICAO international security standards and reduces manual intervention and corruption risks. Senior officials attended the inauguration, highlighting its institutional importance.

Analysis:

The initiative represents a major step toward e-governance and digital transformation in Pakistan's public sector. Real-time monitoring and automation can enhance accountability, reduce delays, and curb corruption in passport issuance. However, successful implementation will depend on institutional capacity, data security, and consistent oversight. Overall, the reform reflects Pakistan's efforts to modernize state institutions and improve citizen-centric service delivery.

Way Forward:

- Expand SHIKRA across all regional passport offices and overseas missions to ensure uniform digital monitoring and service standards.
- Establish a robust cybersecurity and data protection policy to safeguard citizens' biometric and personal data from breaches.
- Institutionalise automated workflows and audit trails to further reduce human intervention and corruption opportunities.

GOVERNANCE

Round-table seeks calibrated, flexible foreign policy



A Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS) roundtable discussed the implications of the US National Security Strategy 2025, urging Pakistan to adopt a flexible and calibrated foreign policy amid intensifying global competition. Experts noted the strategy reflects President Trump's realist, transactional approach prioritising national interest and strategic competition over values-based multilateralism. The discussion highlighted US-China rivalry, evolving alliances, and technology-driven power competition as key factors shaping South Asian security and Pakistan's diplomatic choices.

Analysis:

The discussion underscores Pakistan's need for pragmatic, interest-driven diplomacy in a fragmented global order. A transactional US approach may intensify great power competition, pressuring Pakistan to balance ties with major powers while safeguarding strategic autonomy. The emphasis on technology and economic leverage suggests new arenas of competition beyond traditional military domains.

Way Forward:

- Maintain balanced relationships with all major powers while avoiding over-dependence on any single country to safeguard national interests.
- Follow a realist approach that emphasizes tangible benefits, security, and sovereignty over values-based or transactional pressures from external powers.
- Train diplomats and policymakers in advanced negotiation, geopolitical risk analysis, and strategic foresight to navigate a multipolar world effectively.

Deal signed to officially put PIA under new management



The Government of Pakistan has officially signed transaction documents handing over the management of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to a consortium led by Arif Habib Corporation, marking the formal completion of the airline's privatisation process. The new owners are expected to invest heavily in the carrier to modernize its fleet, enhance services, and restore its past reputation, while oversight and employee safeguards remain points of parliamentary scrutiny.

Analysis:

This deal represents a major shift in Pakistan's economic reform efforts by moving a long-struggling state-owned enterprise into private sector hands, aiming to reduce fiscal losses and improve operational efficiency. However, it also carries political and social sensitivities regarding asset valuation, employee interests, and broader impacts on national infrastructure.

Way Forward:

- Prioritise transparent performance monitoring and regular public reporting on service quality and financial health to build confidence in the privatised PIA's turnaround.
- Ensure structured employee upskilling programs and clear career pathways under the new management to maintain workforce stability and service standards.
- Strengthen regulatory oversight of safety, maintenance, and international compliance to support sustainable operations and rebuild PIA's global reputation.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

K-Electric payables to government surge over 50pc amid tariff dispute



K-Electric's payables to the government rose over 50% in the first half of FY 2025-26, increasing federal receivables from Rs218 billion to Rs329 billion, following a court stay on its multi-year tariff. The surge reflects disputes under the Tariff Differential Subsidy Agreement (TDSA) and delays in subsidy payments, while operational inefficiencies and timing issues also contribute. The government has doubled KE's grid withdrawal, and KE maintains it is meeting obligations under the Power Purchase Agency Agreement despite TDS payment delays.

Analysis:

The rapid growth in payables highlights structural weaknesses in Pakistan's energy tariff framework and subsidy mechanisms. Legal disputes and delayed TDS releases exacerbate fiscal pressures, raising concerns about energy sector governance and efficiency. Resolving these disputes promptly is critical to ensuring financial stability, uninterrupted power supply, and protection of consumer interests.

Way Forward:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the multi-year tariff framework to address structural gaps, ensure cost-reflective pricing, and minimize future disputes.
- Balance financial and operational reforms with consumer interests to avoid excessive tariffs while maintaining a reliable power supply.
- Expedite resolution of court-stayed multi-year tariffs through dialogue between K-Electric, NEPRA, and the government to provide clarity and prevent further accumulation of payables.

ADB keen to fund National Flood Telemetry Project



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has assured WAPDA of funding for climate-resilient projects in Pakistan, including the Naulong Dam and the National Flood Telemetry Project. ADB officials, led by Director Jiangfeng Zhang, met WAPDA Chairman Lt-Gen (retd) Muhammad Saeed to discuss financial support and project details. Senior WAPDA officials also attended the meeting to review funding and implementation plans.

Analysis:

ADB's commitment reflects growing international support for Pakistan's climate adaptation and water infrastructure initiatives. Funding for flood telemetry and dam projects can enhance disaster preparedness, water management, and sustainable development. Successful implementation would mitigate flood risks, improve resource planning, and strengthen Pakistan's resilience against climate-related challenges. This partnership underscores the importance of multilateral financing in advancing national infrastructure and climate resilience goals.

Way Forward:

- Establish clear timelines, accountability mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks for effective execution of climate-resilient infrastructure projects.
- Train WAPDA personnel in modern telemetry, hydrological modeling, and disaster management techniques to maximize project effectiveness.
- Use the National Flood Telemetry Project to develop real-time flood monitoring and early warning capabilities across vulnerable regions.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Centre urged to increase Karachi's water quota from Hub Dam



Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab urged the federal government to increase the city's water quota from Hub Dam, highlighting the unsustainability of relying solely on Keenjhar Lake. The Hub Dam's capacity has been enhanced with a new canal, rehabilitated old canal, and pumping station upgrades, increasing supply to 200 MGD. Desilting and infrastructure improvements are underway, while administrative reforms via the SAP system aim to improve transparency in KMC and Water Board operations.

Analysis:

The initiatives reflect a strategic shift toward diversifying Karachi's water sources and strengthening urban infrastructure to meet growing demand. Modernization of canals, pumps, and reservoir management, combined with SAP-based administrative reforms, addresses both operational inefficiencies and governance issues. Effective implementation could ensure sustainable water supply, enhance service delivery, and restore public confidence in municipal management.

Way Forward:

- Complete desilting, canal rehabilitation, and pumping station upgrades to maximize water delivery efficiency.
- Expand the SAP system for KMC and Water Board to monitor salaries, contracts, pensions, and reduce irregularities.
- Establish a regular maintenance and monitoring schedule for water infrastructure to prevent future pipeline bursts and operational failures.

Premier rolls out major incentives for industrialists



PM Shehbaz Sharif announced a significant incentive package for industrialists and exporters that includes a reduction of Rs 4.04 per unit in electricity tariffs, lower wheeling charges, and a cut in the export refinance rate from 7.5 % to 4.5 %. The government will also issue "blue passports" to leading exporters for two years to further encourage export-led growth and attract foreign direct investment (FDI). He emphasized that sustainable, export-driven economic growth and increased support for SMEs are key to long-term stability.

Analysis:

These incentives aim to bolster Pakistan's competitiveness by lowering production costs and facilitating financing, addressing longstanding barriers to industrial growth and exports. However, structural challenges such as balancing trade deficits and ensuring FDI translate into real job creation remain critical for lasting impact.

Way Forward:

- Expand targeted financing programs beyond large exporters to include small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in key sectors like textiles to diversify export bases and create jobs.
- Pair tariff and power cost reductions with reforms to improve supply chain efficiency and reduce trade imbalances that limit export competitiveness.
- Establish clear metrics and periodic public reporting on the use and impact of "blue passports" and other incentives to ensure accountability and attract sustained private investment.

SECURITY AND LAW & ORDER

9 2 terrorists killed as attacks repulsed in Balochistan



Coordinated militant attacks hit multiple locations across Balochistan, including Quetta, Gwadar, Mastung and other districts, resulting in the deaths of at least 15 security personnel and 18 civilians. Pakistan's military reported that security forces killed 92 terrorists during clearance operations to repel the assaults, which it says were orchestrated by banned separatist groups including the Baloch Liberation Army. Authorities allege foreign direction behind the attacks and launched ongoing sanitisation operations to prevent further violence.

Analysis:

The scale and coordination of these assaults underscore a significant escalation in insurgent activity in Balochistan and highlight persistent security challenges despite ongoing counterterrorism efforts. The state's claims of external backing reflect broader geopolitical tensions that complicate both internal security strategy and regional diplomatic relations.

Way Forward:

- Enhance community security and early warning systems in vulnerable districts by expanding local intelligence networks and civilian-police coordination to detect and disrupt militant planning early.
- Invest in socio-economic development and job creation programs in Balochistan to address root causes of insurgent recruitment.
- Increase cross-border security cooperation and monitoring to limit external support for militant groups.

No quarter for terrorists ruining Balochistan peace



The Balochistan government, amid a recent wave of coordinated militant attacks across the province that killed civilians and security personnel, reported that security forces killed 145 terrorists in 40 hours and vowed to eliminate the threat to peace. Authorities have imposed restrictive security measures, including a ban on large gatherings and public face coverings, and continue combing operations in affected districts to restore stability. The chief minister rejected politicizing the violence and affirmed an uncompromising stance against armed groups.

Analysis:

The article underscores a significant escalation in militancy in Balochistan and the government's reliance on aggressive security operations as the primary response, reflecting the deep challenge of insurgency in the province. However, the focus on forceful suppression risks overlooking long-term political and socio-economic root causes of unrest.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen intelligence-led operations and border security, especially along porous frontiers to disrupt militant planning and arms supply routes.
- Initiate a parallel political dialogue framework with non-violent Baloch stakeholders and civil society to address long-standing grievances alongside security measures, reducing the appeal of insurgency.
- Improve coordination between federal and Balochistan authorities so resources, intelligence, and decisions move faster and security gains are sustained.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan, Myanmar agree to strengthen bilateral relations



Pakistan and Myanmar agreed to strengthen bilateral ties through trade, academic exchanges, cultural engagement, and people-to-people connectivity during high-level talks in Islamabad. The two countries signed an MoU on Political Consultations to institutionalize regular dialogue on bilateral, regional, and international issues. Discussions also covered security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and religious tourism, reflecting a pragmatic reset in relations after years of limited engagement influenced by the Rohingya crisis.

Analysis:

The renewed engagement signals a strategic shift toward practical cooperation and regional stability, balancing past tensions over the Rohingya issue with mutual economic and security interests. Institutionalizing dialogue through the MoU ensures sustained diplomatic communication and coordinated policies. Expanding academic, cultural, and youth exchanges could strengthen long-term people-to-people ties, while security and defense cooperation underscores continuing strategic alignment.

Way Forward:

- Fully implement the MoU on Political Consultations to ensure regular, structured, and result-oriented dialogue between the foreign ministries.
- Continue defense collaboration, training programs, and joint exercises to strengthen regional security and build trust between armed forces.
- Leverage religious tourism opportunities to enhance people-to-people ties and strengthen cultural understanding between Pakistan and Myanmar.

Xi refers to India, China as ‘elephant, dragon dancing together’



China’s President Xi Jinping described China-India relations as those of “good neighbours, friends and partners,” likening the countries to a “dragon and elephant dancing together” in his Republic Day greetings to India. Xi emphasized expanding exchanges, cooperation, and addressing mutual concerns to maintain stable relations. This follows efforts over the past year to improve ties after the 2020 border clash, with resumed direct flights and increased trade and investment.

Analysis:

Xi’s statement signals China’s commitment to stabilizing relations with India despite longstanding border disputes and past military tensions. Economic and diplomatic engagement reflects a pragmatic approach to regional peace and counterbalancing external pressures, such as U.S. foreign policy. The metaphor of “dragon and elephant dancing together” underscores the desire for cooperative coexistence while managing rivalry. Strengthened ties could promote regional stability and open avenues for trade, investment, and strategic dialogue.

Way Forward:

- Maintain strong ties with both India and China diplomatically, promoting neutrality where possible to avoid regional polarization.
- Encourage cross-border cultural, academic, and business exchanges in South Asia to build trust and reduce tensions over the long term.
- Track China-India strategic developments to anticipate impacts on Pakistan’s national security, trade, and regional diplomacy.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

E U, India sign 'massive' trade deal to cut tariffs



India and the European Union have signed a landmark trade agreement after two decades of negotiations, creating a free trade zone of two billion people. The deal cuts or eliminates tariffs on nearly 97% of EU exports, potentially saving €4 billion annually, and provides European firms privileged access to Indian markets in finance, services, and automotive sectors. Key agricultural products like beef, rice, and sugar were excluded, while the agreement also includes a security partnership.

Analysis:

This pact represents a historic economic and strategic milestone, boosting bilateral trade and investment while reducing dependency risks in a volatile global environment. India gains access to advanced technology and investment for infrastructure growth, while the EU benefits from first-mover advantages in a large, protected market. The deal underscores the increasing intertwining of trade and security considerations in modern international relations.

Way Forward:

- Pakistan should closely monitor the India-EU deal, as it strengthens India's access to European markets and could shift regional trade flows, impacting Pakistan's export competitiveness.
- Invest in high-value sectors such as textiles, IT services, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture to compete effectively with India in European and global markets.
- Encourage South Asian regional trade agreements to create complementary rather than competitive market dynamics in response to India-EU integration.

W hy AI won't wipe out white-collar jobs: report



While concerns about AI eliminating white-collar jobs are widespread, according to the *Economist*, data shows it is reshaping rather than erasing them. Since late 2022, the U.S. added around 3 million white-collar jobs, with real wages rising by 5–9% in professional and administrative sectors. AI automates routine tasks but enhances productivity, allowing humans to focus on high-value work, while technological progress creates entirely new occupations.

Analysis:

AI is functioning as a productivity tool rather than a replacement, upgrading professional roles and sustaining employment growth. Historical trends, such as in air-traffic control and digital industries, demonstrate that automation generates new tasks and roles, suggesting fears of mass white-collar unemployment are exaggerated. Strategic reskilling and task optimization are key for maximizing AI's benefits in the workforce.

Way Forward:

- Pakistani businesses and government departments should view AI as a complement to human effort, not a replacement, and focusing on automating routine tasks.
- Pakistan should incentivize tech startups, e-commerce, fintech, and digital services to generate new white-collar employment.
- The government should develop AI policies ensuring ethical use, data privacy, and AI adoption guidelines for both public and private sectors to maximize benefits while minimizing risks to employment.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan among 26 countries named founding members of Trump's Gaza 'Board of Peace'



26 countries were added to the Trump led Board of Peace for Gaza, introduced on the World Economic Forum the 26 signatories include Pakistan alongside Turkiye, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kosovo, El Salvador etc while Russian participation was denied. The newly formed international organization is set up to oversee the ceasefire and lead the reconstruction of Gaza. Its charter, however, expands its mandate to peace-building in all areas affected by or at risk of conflict.

Analysis:

Islamabad's membership brings significant recognition to Pakistan on an international level considering it is the only country from South Asia to be a member of the board. However, there is room for debate considering a mix of response from the internal political community claiming that US leadership does not support Palestinian self determination. However, Pakistan can make best use of its membership by representing Palestinian demands and condemning Israel's continuous violations of the ceasefire.

Way Forward:

- Condemn Israel's 1300 violations of the ceasefire and recommend viable legal frameworks for effective ceasefire with Gaza and neighbouring countries including Lebanon.
- Pakistan should support the board by taking lead on providing medical assistance for Gazans by sending doctors or receiving patients.
- Pakistan should advocate for international transparency in rehabilitation of displaced Gazans and ensure support by redevelopment.

Pakistan-China Mineral Cooperation: Opportunities, Risks, and the Path Forward



Pakistan and China signed multiple memoranda of understanding at the Pak-China Mineral Cooperation Forum in Islamabad, reaffirming cooperation to develop Pakistan's mineral sector beyond primary extraction. The agreements include investment facilitation, technical cooperation, and digital integration through the launch of the Pak-China E-Mining Platform. Chinese firms were invited to participate in the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum 2026, with both sides emphasising value addition, mineral processing, and integration with industrial zones under the broader CPEC framework.

Analysis:

The renewed focus on mineral cooperation reflects Pakistan's effort to position itself within the global race for critical minerals by leveraging strategic partnerships, particularly with China. The initiative underscores a policy shift from resource extraction towards downstream processing, industrialisation, and supply-chain integration, aligning with Pakistan's broader development and export diversification objectives. It also signals continuity in CPEC's evolution from infrastructure-led projects to sectoral and industrial cooperation, while highlighting governance priorities such as digital transparency, policy stability, and federal-provincial coordination.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen institutional and regulatory frameworks to support value-added mineral development and investor confidence.
- Enhance technical capacity and data transparency through digital platforms and joint geological collaboration.
- Develop minerals sustainably to secure long-term economic gains.

POLICY NUGGETS

1 Balochistan's AI-led hiring marks a shift toward transparent public recruitment

Impact

Reduces human discretion, curbs nepotism, and improves trust in public hiring by ensuring transparency.

Recommendation

Develop legal and ethical frameworks to ensure accountability, data protection, and inclusivity in automated governance systems.

"Technology is best when it brings people together and makes institutions fairer." – Tim Berners Lee

2 Routine violations of the ministers' code reflect a deeper failure of accountability

Impact

Weakens collective responsibility, erodes public trust, and blurs constitutional boundaries between authority and accountability.

Recommendation

Establish an independent enforcement mechanism with clear penalties for violations of the code. *"The strength of a democracy depends on the integrity of those entrusted with power."* – Theodore Roosevelt

3 Ending agents' role in vehicle valuation

Impact

Reduces discretionary pricing, limits under-invoicing of luxury imports, and strengthens revenue collection.

Recommendation

Strengthen digital verification systems and cross-border data sharing with manufacturers to ensure accurate valuations. *"Transparency is not the same as full disclosure. Transparency is a spirit of openness."* – Bob Vanourek

4 PM backs NAB's professional independence to enhance its credibility

Impact

Guaranteed independence ends political victimization and restores public trust in the law.

Recommendation

Legislating a bipartisan selection process and financial autonomy to remove executive control.

"Justice is truth in action." – Benjamin Disraeli

5 Surveillance heightened on borders as Nipah virus threatens Asia

Impact

Strict and enhanced health surveillance at borders prevents Nipah virus from entering the country through infected foreigners.

Recommendation

Outline SOPs for international travelers and tourists entering Pakistan. Coordinate with hospitals and public spaces for health safety protocols.

"An ounce of prevention in public health is worth far more than a pound of cure in a pandemic. Surveillance is that ounce." – Benjamin Franklin

6 Kazakhstan eyes a rail corridor to Pakistan's ports amplifying regional connectivity

Impact

This route will turn Pakistan into a primary trade gateway for landlocked Central Asia.

Recommendation

Secure the path by normalising relations and finalizing a solid transit treaty with Afghanistan.

"The modern supply chain is no longer merely a network; it is the lifeline of global trade." – Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem

7 Tehran's diplomatic signal to Riyadh, a shift from confrontation to de-escalation.

Impact

De-escalation reduces regional proxy wars and secures vital global energy corridors.

Recommendation

Move beyond rhetoric by establishing a permanent joint hotline to prevent accidental military escalations.

"The best weapon is to sit down and talk." – Nelson Mandela

8 An emerging crisis in Tirah requires dire attention

Impact

Overcrowded makeshift camps lack adequate shelter, privacy, and protection from the elements.

Recommendation

Prioritize unhindered humanitarian access and establish safe corridors for civilian evacuation and aid delivery.

"Good governance is the bridge between despair and hope for populations trapped in crisis." – Helen Clark

9 Parliamentary committee seeks institutionalisation of Peca for efficient delivery

Impact

Institutionalisation would ensure strengthened and responsive complaint-handling mechanism.

Recommendation

Outline SOPs for digital engagement deterring offenders with strict regulations.

"The fight against cybercrime is not a technological battle alone; it is a test of our collective ethics, laws, and cooperation." – Kofi Annan



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