



Weekly



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CONTENTS

Overview

Governance

CII backs reforms on women's right to seek dissolution of nikah

Maryam inaugurates PTCH, EVCCC

No more PTDC role in service delivery

CM says fire services to be placed under one institution

Social Issues

4,000 doctors left Pakistan in 2025

'AI deepfakes fuel child sexual abuse content'

Security and Law & Order

Punjab pushes police-led effort to counter radicalisation

31 lives lost in suicide attack on capital imambargah



International Affairs

Revelations from 'Epstein Files' continue to haunt global elite

Trump announces trade deal with India

Politicisation of cricket originated in India, not in Pakistan: Sherry

PIA enters air cargo partnership with Air France-KLM

Kazakh president arrives to boost wide-ranging ties

Xi holds back-to-back talks with Trump and Putin

Pakistan urges UN to list BLA as terrorist group

Pakistan invited to first 'Board of Peace' meeting, likely to attend, say sources

Policy Nuggets

OVERVIEW



This week's *Policy Pulse* reflects a dense convergence of governance reform, social protection challenges, internal security concerns, and active diplomatic engagement, underscoring Pakistan's ongoing efforts to recalibrate institutions while navigating complex domestic and international pressures. Collectively, the coverage highlights a policy landscape shaped by reformist impulses, capacity constraints, and the need for coordinated state responses.

On governance and service delivery, key developments signal a shift toward institutional nationalization and rights based policy making. The Council of Islamic Ideology's endorsement of reforms enabling women to seek dissolution of *nikah* strengthens access to justice within a Shariah-aligned legal framework, while Punjab's push for electric public transport demonstrates how climate action, social inclusion, and urban governance are increasingly intersecting. Similarly, the restructuring of PTDC and Sindh's proposal to consolidate fire services reflect attempts to professionalize public institutions, devolve service delivery, and address long-standing inefficiencies that directly affect citizen safety and economic competitiveness.

Social and security-related news items point to deeper structural stresses. The record outflow of doctors highlights systemic weaknesses in health-sector retention and workforce planning, with long term implications for human development. At the same time, warnings on AI-generated child sexual abuse content expose regulatory gaps where technological change is outpacing legal safeguards. In the security domain, the Islamabad suicide attack and Punjab's move toward prevention-focused counter-radicalization illustrate the persistent threat of militancy and a gradual policy shift from reactive enforcement to early intervention and community based approaches.

Internationally, Pakistan's diplomacy reflects both diversification and balancing. Engagements ranging from Central Asia and the Middle East to global security forums, alongside developments in US-India trade relations and great-power diplomacy, indicate a fluid external environment requiring strategic agility to protect economic and security interests.

The Policy Nuggets reinforce these themes by emphasizing centre province coordination, inclusive education, women's economic participation, counter terrorism consolidation, and proactive diplomacy, collectively pointing toward governance that is collaborative, preventive, and future oriented.

In conclusion, this week's developments suggest that Pakistan's policy challenge lies less in identifying priorities and more in translating reform intent into sustained institutional capacity and coherent implementation.

Pakistan is grappling with complex domestic and international pressures as it pursues governance and social reforms, manages security and capacity constraints, and seeks to translate reform intent into effective, coordinated institutional action.

GOVERNANCE

CII backs reforms on women's right to seek dissolution of nikah



The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) has, in principle, endorsed reforms under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, allowing women to seek dissolution of nikah on grounds such as a missing husband, non-payment of maintenance, imprisonment, illness, impotence, and misuse of authority in child marriages. The Council also reaffirmed that honour killings are un-Islamic, approved conditional uterine transplantation, ruled against the use of dural repair patches, and permitted separate recycling of sacred pages.

Analysis:

These recommendations signal a balanced, Shariah-based recognition of women's rights within Pakistan's legal framework while maintaining religious boundaries on biomedical and ethical matters. The stance strengthens women's access to justice, reinforces the rule of law, and aligns Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary social and legal challenges.

Way Forward:

- Family courts should be trained on gender-sensitive and Shariah-aligned interpretations to ensure timely and fair relief for women seeking dissolution of nikah.
- State institutions must launch awareness campaigns so women understand their legal rights regarding maintenance, imprisonment, illness, and missing spouses.
- A periodic review mechanism involving CII, judiciary, and civil society should assess implementation and societal impact.

Maryam inaugurates PTCH, EVCCC



Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz inaugurated the Punjab Transport Company Headquarters (PTCH) and the EV Command and Control Centre (EVCCC) in Lahore, highlighting the government's push for clean, modern, and inclusive public transport. She reviewed electric bus facilities, ordered expansion of routes and fleet size, emphasized solar-powered charging, and praised initiatives supporting women, students, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities.

Analysis:

The initiative reflects strong governance-led urban development, combining sustainable transport, climate action, and social welfare. By integrating electric mobility, smart systems, and women-focused economic empowerment, the Punjab government is addressing mobility, environmental challenges, and social inclusion simultaneously, marking a shift toward people-centered and environmentally responsible public policy.

Way Forward:

- Fast-track the transition of electric bus charging systems to solar energy to lower operational costs and carbon emissions.
- Fully operationalize carbon credit mechanisms under the Green Bus Project to support financial sustainability.
- Utilize the EV Command and Control Centre for data-driven planning, safety monitoring, and service efficiency across Punjab.

GOVERNANCE

N o more PTDC role in service delivery



The Cabinet Committee on State-Owned Enterprises (CCoSOEs) approved restructuring PTDC by limiting its role to national and international branding, coordination with provinces, and tourism strategy development, while devolving service delivery to the provinces. The Board will be reduced from 18 to six members, with a mix of public and private sector representation, and only sectoral experts will be hired. PTDC will function as a “centre of excellence” to promote Brand Pakistan, with streamlined staff and governance.

Analysis:

This move reflects a shift toward provincial empowerment under the 18th Amendment and professionalization of PTDC, focusing on strategic oversight rather than operational service delivery. It aims to enhance Pakistan’s tourism brand globally while ensuring efficient governance and alignment with international procurement and corporate standards.

Way Forward:

- Align all operations with international procurement, governance, and corporate standards to ensure transparency, efficiency, and global competitiveness.
- Develop clear frameworks for managing existing PTDC assets and sustainable funding mechanisms for ongoing tourism initiatives.
- Fully devolve tourism service delivery to provinces while providing them with technical guidance and best practices from PTDC.

C M says fire services to be placed under one institution



Addressing the 21st My Karachi Exhibition, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah stated that the province’s fragmented fire-fighting services—currently spread across agencies like Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, Rescue-1122, and Karachi Port Trust—will be consolidated under a single institution to improve efficiency and response times. He also noted China has offered cooperation for training, and the Sindh government is assisting Gul Plaza fire victims as part of its broader focus on public safety.

Analysis:

This move reflects recognition that decentralized fire services have hindered coordinated emergency response in Pakistan’s largest province, especially in the wake of high-casualty urban fires like Gul Plaza. Centralizing command could reduce duplication and improve rapid response, but success depends on proper resourcing and enforcement of safety standards.

Way Forward:

- Expedite creation of a provincial fire service under one command to avoid confusion and delays during emergencies.
- Invest in modern fire-fighting equipment and regular training, using international support where available.
- Strictly enforce fire safety laws in buildings and markets, with penalties for non-compliance to prevent future disasters.

SOCIAL ISSUES

4,000 doctors left Pakistan in 2025



In 2025, nearly 4,000 doctors left Pakistan, marking the highest annual outflow in the country's history. Although Pakistan produces around 22,000 new doctors yearly and has over 370,000 registered doctors, many are inactive, underemployed, or working abroad, leaving healthcare coverage below WHO benchmarks for the population of 250 million. Doctor emigration has accelerated since 2010, indicating a growing trend rather than a temporary spike.

Analysis:

The rising exodus highlights systemic issues in Pakistan's health sector, including poor retention, limited incentives, and weak working conditions. This trend suggests that the medical education system may be unintentionally training doctors for international markets, raising concerns about the country's capacity to meet domestic healthcare needs.

Way Forward

- Expand postgraduate training opportunities, mentorship programs, and promotions to retain talent within Pakistan.
- Introduce incentives for doctors to serve in under-served areas.
- Improve working conditions, salaries, and career growth opportunities to retain doctors.

'A I deepfakes fuel child sexual abuse content'



UNICEF has warned of a rapid rise in AI-generated sexualised images of children, where photos of minors are manipulated to appear nude or in sexual scenarios—so-called "deepfake" abuse that blurs the line between synthetic content and real harm. The agency says this trend presents grave risks to children's safety, normalises exploitation, and challenges existing legal and digital safety frameworks. It is urging stricter prevention, protection, and global action from governments and tech companies to stop the creation and spread of such harmful content.

Analysis:

The alarming surge in AI-generated child sexual abuse material shows that technological advancements can rapidly outpace legal and protective systems, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation in ways that are psychologically harmful even without direct physical contact. This highlights the urgent need for both global and national policy responses that treat synthetic abuse as equally serious as conventional abuse.

Way Forward:

- Update Pakistan's cybercrime laws to explicitly criminalise the creation, possession, and distribution of AI-generated child sexual abuse content under child protection statutes.
- Empower digital law enforcement units like the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) with AI-driven detection tools and training to identify and remove deepfake abuse quickly.
- Launch nationwide digital safety education in schools and communities to teach children, parents, and teachers about the risks of AI misuse and how to report harmful content.

SECURITY AND LAW & ORDER

Punjab pushes police-led effort to counter radicalisation



Punjab is advancing a prevention-driven counterterrorism strategy by proposing dedicated Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) units within the police and Counter Terrorism Departments. These units aim to identify vulnerable individuals early, engage communities, and implement deradicalisation and rehabilitation programs, in line with the National Policy on Prevention of Violent Extremism 2024. Multidisciplinary teams, including police, social workers, and psychologists, will focus on intelligence, community outreach, and counter-narratives like Paigham-e-Pakistan.

Analysis:

The initiative reflects a shift from reactive law enforcement to proactive, inclusive security, emphasizing early intervention, social cohesion, and long-term reintegration of radicalised individuals. By institutionalising prevention at the district level, Punjab seeks to enhance internal security while addressing the social and psychological dimensions of extremism.

Way Forward:

- Establish feedback and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of PVE initiatives and continuously improve strategies based on community needs and emerging threats.
- Equip personnel with skills to identify early warning signs of radicalisation, communicate effectively with diverse communities, and respond proportionately to non-violent threats.
- Expand dedicated Preventing Violent Extremism units across Punjab districts and eventually nationwide, ensuring early detection of vulnerable individuals.

31 lives lost in suicide attack on capital imambargah



At least 31 people were killed and around 169 others wounded when a suicide bomber struck during Friday prayers at the Khadija Tul Kubra imambargah in the Tarlai area on the outskirts of Islamabad, making it one of the deadliest attacks on the capital in over a decade. The attacker detonated explosives after being stopped at the mosque gate, and whilst no group has universally claimed responsibility yet, officials and investigators have linked the suspect with the Islamic State. Moreover, government representatives, including Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, have stated that India and Afghanistan are behind this dastardly attack. The explosion prompted widespread grief, national leadership condemnations, and international reactions, including China's strong condemnation and support for Pakistan's security efforts.

Analysis:

The attack highlights the continuing threat of militant violence inside Pakistan, even in heavily guarded urban centres like Islamabad, underscoring persistent security vulnerabilities and the challenge of protecting vulnerable communities during religious gatherings. It also reflects geopolitical tensions, given the government's assertions about cross-border militant links and subsequent diplomatic condemnations.

Way Forward:

- Enhance security protocols at all religious sites, especially Shi'a places of worship, with thorough screening and rapid response teams.
- Strengthen intelligence cooperation and border controls to disrupt militant training and movement into Pakistan.
- Expand community outreach and sectarian harmony initiatives to reduce the appeal of extremist violence and support vulnerable groups.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

R evelations from ‘Epstein Files’ continue to haunt global elite



Fresh Jeffrey Epstein files, comprising over three million documents, images, and videos, have implicated global figures including the British royal family, Norwegian and Slovakian officials, and former Israeli leadership, revealing ties to Epstein, social and financial connections, and instances of poor judgment. The release also exposed privacy breaches, with unredacted images of victims, sparking outrage and political resignations.

Analysis:

The disclosures highlight systemic failures in safeguarding sensitive information, the far-reaching influence of Epstein over elites, and the ethical lapses of prominent figures. They underscore ongoing challenges in accountability, victim protection, and the intersection of wealth, power, and criminal networks on a global scale.

Way Forward:

- The Epstein revelations underscore how powerful individuals worldwide evade accountability, emphasizing the need for Pakistan to strengthen legal and ethical standards for public officials.
- Pakistan can reinforce its laws on protecting victims of sexual exploitation, especially minors, ensuring digital and physical safety, and strict enforcement against perpetrators.
- Pakistan should engage actively in international treaties and collaborations to combat human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and financial crimes linked to global networks.

T rump announces trade deal with India



US President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India reducing US tariffs on Indian goods from 50% to 18%, in exchange for India lowering trade barriers and potentially stopping purchases of Russian oil in favor of US and Venezuelan oil. Modi welcomed the tariff reduction but did not confirm halting Russian oil imports. The deal also includes India buying over \$500 billion of US products, boosting bilateral trade. Following the announcement, major US-listed Indian companies' shares rose.

Analysis:

The deal signals US efforts to influence India's energy sourcing amid geopolitical tensions, using tariffs as leverage. Economically, lower tariffs and increased US exports could strengthen bilateral trade, while India balances its energy security and strategic autonomy. The claims about stopping Russian oil remain politically sensitive and unverified, leaving implementation and geopolitical impact uncertain.

Way Forward:

- Pakistan can explore diversifying trade partners and seeking similar preferential agreements with the US or other markets.
- Pakistan may need to recalibrate its foreign policy, balancing relations with the US, Russia, and India amid shifting alliances.
- Pakistan must strengthen diplomatic, trade, and energy strategies to secure economic resilience and regional influence.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

P oliticisation of cricket originated in India, not in Pakistan: Sherry



Senator Sherry Rehman criticized India for politicizing cricket, calling out selective peace, sportsmanship, and diplomatic double standards in South Asia. She emphasized that Pakistan has upheld fair play in sports and diplomacy, while India has imposed boycotts, political pressure, and isolation tactics. Pakistan's conditional participation in the T20 World Cup is framed as a principled diplomatic stance, defending both sports integrity and national interests.

Analysis:

The statement highlights the intersection of sports and diplomacy, portraying cricket as a tool of political influence in India-Pakistan relations. It reinforces Pakistan's position on responsible statecraft, regional stability, and fairness, while signaling that bilateral sports engagement cannot be decoupled from broader diplomatic norms.

Way Forward:

- Leverage international cricket and sports organizations to mediate disputes and ensure fair treatment of all teams in global tournaments.
- Recognize and address the economic impact of disrupted cricket ties, ensuring that sports policies support both national and regional industries.
- Encourage cricket as a platform for fostering mutual respect and regional cooperation rather than a tool for political leverage.

P IA enters air cargo partnership with Air France-KLM



PIA has entered a cargo partnership with Air France-KLM, effective January 15, to expand its global freight connectivity. The agreement allows Pakistani exporters to ship goods across Europe and the US using a single air waybill. Cargo will connect via Dubai, Riyadh and Dammam to major European hubs and US cities. The move is aimed at improving access to global markets for Pakistani products.

Analysis:

This partnership strengthens PIA's cargo operations without heavy capital investment, leveraging Air France-KLM's established global network. It can enhance Pakistan's export competitiveness by reducing logistical barriers and transit complexity. If implemented efficiently, the deal may boost foreign exchange earnings and support trade diversification. However, sustained gains will depend on PIA's operational reliability and cargo handling efficiency.

Way Forward:

- Use the PIA-Air France-KLM cargo network to prioritise high-value and time-sensitive Pakistani exports such as textiles, perishables, pharmaceuticals and surgical goods.
- Ensure timely cargo handling, digital tracking and coordination at transit hubs (Dubai, Riyadh, Dammam) to build exporter confidence.
- Actively market this partnership to exporters and freight forwarders to fully utilise capacity and increase foreign exchange earnings.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Kazakh president arrives to boost wide-ranging ties



Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev arrived in Pakistan on his first state visit and was warmly received by President Asif Ali Zardari and PM Shehbaz Sharif. The visit aims to review bilateral ties and expand cooperation in trade, logistics, regional connectivity and people-to-people contacts. President Tokayev is also set to address the Pakistan-Kazakhstan Business Forum. Separately, PM Shehbaz held talks with a high-level Libyan delegation to strengthen bilateral relations.

Analysis:

President Tokayev's visit signals Pakistan's growing diplomatic engagement with Central Asia, particularly in trade and connectivity. It reflects a strategic push to convert cultural affinities into tangible economic cooperation. The meeting with the Libyan delegation further highlights Pakistan's intent to broaden ties across regions. Collectively, these engagements underline Islamabad's focus on diversified diplomacy and regional stability.

Way Forward:

- Pakistan should prioritise trade agreements with Kazakhstan, focusing on energy, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, textiles and logistics to boost exports to Central Asia.
- Leverage Kazakhstan's strategic location by strengthening transport corridors (road, rail and air) linking Pakistan with Central Asia through regional transit routes.
- Regular Pakistan-Kazakhstan business forums and private-sector partnerships should be institutionalised to convert diplomatic goodwill into investment flows.

Xi holds back-to-back talks with Trump and Putin



Over the past week Chinese President Xi has actively been involved in direct engagement with the American and Russian presidents, conducting one on one calls with both presidents. The call occurred ahead of President Trump's visit to China in April. No details about the calls were shared by the Chinese state media. On the other hand, there is constant communication with the Russian counterpart to ensure steady developments along the right track. According to the Russian side, the two sides opinions "practically matched" on the US. Moreover, President Xi affirmed support for a UN-centered global system, amid concerns Trump's "Board of Peace" could rival it, called for "strategic coordination" amidst tariff threats and global instability and supported ongoing negotiations in Abu Dhabi between Russia, Ukraine, and US.

Analysis:

China feels the turbulence caused by the US and is carefully viewing the unfolding security dynamics. Simultaneous talks with Russian counterparts also aims to reflect the strength of China's diplomatic ties. It aims to show China as a responsible and leading state in global affairs.

Way forward:

- Pakistan should make good use of China's strengthening role in international relations by progressing economic relations via CPEC
- Considering Pakistan's role in fostering US China relations in the past, Pakistan should provide a platform to engage global leaders for strategic coordination
- While being on the US's Board of Peace, Pakistan should also simultaneously engage China to show mutual engagement.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan urges UN to list BLA as terrorist group



Pakistan has urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to expedite the designation of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a terrorist organisation under the UN's 1267 sanctions regime. The request follows a series of recent attacks in Balochistan that were formally condemned by the UNSC, which described them as acts of terrorism and called for accountability of perpetrators, financiers, and sponsors. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, noted that the listing request is already under consideration and welcomed international expressions of solidarity and support. It is also highlighted that last year, the US State Department added BLA and its alias, the Majeed Brigade, to its Foreign Terrorist Organisation list.

Analysis:

Pakistan's push for the BLA's designation reflects a broader effort to internationalise its counterterrorism narrative and align domestic security challenges with global security frameworks. The development underscores Pakistan's reliance on multilateral mechanisms to address militancy, particularly in regions with long-standing security and governance challenges. It also signals an attempt to strengthen diplomatic legitimacy for counterterrorism measures by framing the issue within international law and collective security norms.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen diplomatic engagement with UNSC members to support evidence-based counterterrorism cooperation.
- Enhance coordination between domestic security efforts and international legal frameworks.
- Ensure that security measures are complemented by inclusive governance and development initiatives in affected regions

Pakistan invited to first 'Board of Peace' meeting, likely to attend, say sources



Pakistan has been invited to attend the first meeting of the US-led "Board of Peace" on Gaza scheduled for February 19 in Washington. Pakistan may likely participate in the meeting as a founding member that signed its charter in January 2026. The meeting will focus on structuring the board's mandate and secretariat, though discussions on troop contributions or operational roles are considered premature.

Analysis:

Pakistan's participation reflects a diplomatic balancing act—staying engaged in international efforts on Palestine whilst trying not to appear to endorse external control over Palestinian affairs, given its longstanding support for an independent state for Palestinians.

Way Forward:

- Clarify Pakistan's position publicly to reaffirm support for Palestinian self-determination while explaining why it is engaging with the Board of Peace.
- Push for meaningful Palestinian representation within the Board's structure to ensure any decisions reflect Palestinian voices directly.
- Condition Pakistan's deeper involvement on clear humanitarian and legal safeguards that align with international law and Pakistan's foreign policy principles.

POLICY NUGGETS

1 PM urges for cooperation between centre & province for vital for peace

Impact

Ensures efficiency in curbing militant violence in KP; provides peace, development and public welfare in the province.

Recommendation

Federal govt should empower and engage local stakeholders in fight against terrorism.

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”
— Margaret J. Wheatley

2 US & Iran set to resume nuclear talks this week

Impact

Signals diplomatic pivot following weeks of war threats and a tense military build-up.

Recommendation

Pakistan can participate in trilateral meetings for regional stability and security amid tensed relations.

“The trilateral cooperation is a vital platform to promote regional security and economic connectivity. We must pursue a path of cooperative and common security.” — Wang Yi

3 Unesco advocates for inclusive & innovative education

Impact

Highlights need for development and modernisation in the local education system.

Recommendation

Pakistan needs to focus on skill building and update curriculum in relevance to technological developments.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. But it must be an education that keeps pace with the changing needs of the world.” — Nelson Mandela

4 Women’s inclusion is smart economics, not social charity

Impact

Wasting human capital causing long-term losses in productivity, household welfare, and economic growth.

Recommendation

Prioritising girls’ education, women’s workforce entry, and recognition of unpaid and informal labour.

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.” — Kofi Annan

5 Balochistan intensifies counterterrorism efforts to restore security

Impact

Weakens militant networks in Balochistan, improves prosecution outcomes, and strengthens the state’s writ in previously ungoverned areas.

Recommendation

Complement kinetic measures with governance reforms, development initiatives, and counter-extremism programmes to ensure long-term peace.

“The rule of law is the foundation for peace and security.” — Kofi Annan

6 Pakistan joins US-Iran talks to support diplomacy and regional stability

Impact

Reinforces its role as a regional bridge-builder, offering diplomatic support to prevent escalation, and contribute to a peaceful resolution.

Recommendation

Pakistan should leverage its neutral standing to encourage sustained dialogue and confidence-building.

“Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way.” — David Frost

7 Islamabad & Astana establish strategic partnership through \$1bn trade target

Impact

Enhances potential of Pakistan’s ports of Karachi and Gwadar for regional trade.

Recommendation

Pakistan should ensure efficient security measures for enhanced investments in development and trade projects.

“Growth, development and stability are closely linked... the effectiveness of national policies can be significantly enhanced by regional cooperation.” — United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

8 Pakistan decides not to play with India in T20 World Cup

Impact

Reflects Pakistan’s clear stance that there should be no politics on the playing field.

Recommendation

Pakistan should ensure that mutual respect is shown and that Indian disrespect towards neither nation is not tolerated.

“Soft power is not just a matter of ephemeral popularity; it is a means of obtaining outcomes.”—Joseph Nye

9 Sindh makes HIV, TB and Hepatitis screening of deportees mandatory

Impact

Aims to control the spread of chronic diseases into the general population.

Recommendation

Other airports should also ensure sufficient medical screening facilities to control spread of diseases.

“Early detection and screening are among the most powerful tools we have to prevent the development of life-threatening diseases and to improve the chances of successful treatment.” — Margaret Chan



Editorial Team

**Dr. Naveed Elahi
Naeema Naem
Jahanzeb Waheed
Sadia Pirzada**

Editorial Assistants

**Saffa Amjad
Barraaq Sohail
Laiba Tanveer
Abdul Wakeel**

National School of Public Policy
87- Shahrah e Quaid e Azam, Lahore.

Email: polycypulse.nipp@nspp.gov.pk