



Weekly



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OVERVIEW

This week's Policy Pulse reflects a policy environment shaped by governance reforms, social sector challenges, escalating regional security dynamics, and intensified diplomatic engagement. The overall theme is institutional responsiveness in the face of complex internal and external pressures, as Pakistan seeks to strengthen governance systems, manage socio-economic vulnerabilities, and navigate a volatile regional environment.

On the governance and socio-economic front, developments highlight efforts to strengthen accountability and social service delivery. The federal government's decision to introduce austerity measures and fuel conservation policies reflects growing concerns over energy security and economic stability. The federal "No Child Left Behind" campaign to identify out-of-school children in Islamabad signals renewed commitment to Article 25-A and inclusive education. Meanwhile, contingency planning for a potential gas crisis and renewed funding for the Karachi IT Park illustrate parallel priorities of energy security and digital development.

Security and foreign policy developments remain central this week. Intensified cross-border clashes with Afghan forces and counterterrorism operations reflect a more assertive approach to dismantling militant sanctuaries. Simultaneously, Pakistan is engaged in active regional diplomacy, facilitating dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and offering to support de-escalation between Iran and the United States. Discussions within the United Nations and evolving regional conflicts further underscore the complexity of Pakistan's external environment.

The policy nuggets reinforce these themes by highlighting economic stabilization efforts, concerns about trade deficits and tax equity, social protection initiatives, education financing, and the importance of transparent digital governance and strategic diplomacy.

Overall, the week's developments indicate that Pakistan's central policy challenge lies in strengthening institutional capacity while balancing domestic reform priorities with growing regional security and diplomatic responsibilities.



Pakistan seeks to strengthen governance systems, manage socio-economic vulnerabilities, and navigate a volatile regional environment.

GOVERNANCE

NCCIA receives 138,612 reports this year on Child sex abuse material



The Senate was informed that the National Centre for Child Protection and Cyber Crime Awareness (NCCIA) has received 138,612 reports of child sexual abuse material this year. Officials briefed the house on the scale of online child exploitation, highlighting the agency's efforts to track and block such content. The figures underscore the growing challenge of digital child protection in Pakistan.

Analysis:

The staggering number of reports reveals the alarming prevalence of online child sexual abuse material in Pakistan and the immense scale of the challenge facing law enforcement. This data suggests the actual problem may be far larger. The figure reflects both increased awareness and reporting mechanisms, but also exposes gaps in prevention, digital literacy, and the capacity of institutions to respond effectively.

Way Forward:

- Enact comprehensive legislation mandating stricter age verification, content moderation, and reporting obligations for social media platforms and internet service providers operating in Pakistan
- Launch public awareness campaigns targeting parents, teachers, and children about online safety, grooming risks, and reporting mechanisms, integrating these into school curricula.
- Establish specialized courts and trained prosecutors to ensure swift justice in child exploitation cases, with protections for child witnesses and survivors throughout the legal process

PM to unveil austerity plan today to cope with war fallout



Due to the economic fallout of the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict escalation 2026, Shehbaz Sharif is set to announce an austerity plan to manage Pakistan's rising fuel costs and potential supply disruptions. The government has already increased petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre while ensuring current fuel reserves and expecting three petroleum shipments to arrive. Officials warn that Pakistan's monthly oil import bill could rise to \$600 million, and LNG supplies may also face disruptions.

Analysis:

The crisis highlights Pakistan's heavy dependence on imported energy and its vulnerability to geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East. The austerity plan and fuel-saving measures aim to stabilize reserves and reduce economic pressure, but rising oil prices could further strain Pakistan's fragile economy. Effective coordination with provinces and alternative energy supply routes will be critical to prevent shortages and economic instability.

Way Forward:

- The government should create long-term national oil reserves so that Pakistan can sustain fuel supply for several months during international crises or supply disruptions.
- The government should implement structured fuel-saving policies such as work-from-home options, improved public transport usage, and reduced government fuel consumption.
- Pakistan should seek temporary fiscal flexibility from the International Monetary Fund and adopt targeted subsidies to shield vulnerable populations from rising fuel prices.

GOVERNANCE

M inistry to conduct household survey in capital to trace out-of-school children



The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has launched the “No Child Left Behind” campaign in Islamabad to identify and enroll out-of-school children (OOSC) through a union council-wise household survey. The initiative includes door-to-door outreach, real-time data monitoring, and collaboration with partner organizations to ensure every child gains access to formal or non-formal education. The campaign emphasizes transparency, accountability, and community involvement.

Analysis:

This initiative reflects a strong government commitment to implementing constitutional rights (Article 25-A) and improving education governance. By combining monitoring, incentives, and skill-linked education, it aims to reduce child labor and dropout rates, strengthen social inclusion, and ensure equitable access to education for vulnerable children.

Way Forward:

- Link education with skill-building programs to demonstrate long-term livelihood benefits to families and reduce child labor.
- Provide flexible school timings and accelerated learning programs to accommodate children engaged in economic or household activities.
- Implement real-time data entry and structured tracking systems to monitor student enrollment, attendance, and learning outcomes.

S indh orders probe into Rs20bn worker welfare schemes



The Sindh government has launched a probe into Rs20 billion projects of the Sindh Workers Welfare Board (SWWB), citing alleged embezzlement, misappropriation, and administrative irregularities by the previous management. Controversial schemes, including a Rs3 billion e-bike project and housing allocations, have been withdrawn, while workers’ grants have been increased. The new governing body emphasizes transparency, accountability, and protection of workers’ rights.

Analysis:

The move reflects the government’s focus on institutional accountability and safeguarding labor interests. By investigating past mismanagement and enhancing welfare grants, Sindh aims to restore trust, ensure proper utilization of funds, and strengthen governance in worker-related programs.

Way Forward:

- Hold individuals or entities involved in fraud, embezzlement, or administrative irregularities accountable through legal and administrative actions.
- Implement periodic financial and performance audits to prevent recurrence of irregularities in future projects.
- Provide regular updates to the public and workers on progress, welfare initiatives, and outcomes of investigations to rebuild trust in the institution.

SOCIO ECONOMIC ISSUES

G

ovt working on options to cope with impending gas crisis



The government is developing contingency plans to address a potential gas crisis as the Strait of Hormuz is closed due to regional tensions. Officials are reviewing emergency measures including demand management, alternative fuel switching, and prioritizing supplies for domestic and critical sectors. The planning reflects growing concerns about energy security amid escalating conflict in the Middle East that could disrupt LNG imports passing through the strategic waterway.

Analysis:

Pakistan's vulnerability to external shocks is starkly exposed by this contingency planning, as the country relies almost entirely on LNG imports from Gulf states passing through the Strait. Any sustained closure would cripple energy supplies, affecting households, power generation, and industrial production. The crisis scenario underscores the strategic imperative of energy diversification and highlights Pakistan's limited leverage over geopolitical events in the Gulf.

Way Forward:

- Fast-track development of alternative energy infrastructure including renewable projects and imported coal/gas pipelines from other regions to reduce dependence on Hormuz transit.
- Negotiate diplomatic assurances and emergency energy supply agreements with friendly countries, including potential strategic reserves or priority access during crises.
- Accelerate exploration of domestic gas reserves and cross-border pipeline projects such as TAPI to diversify supply sources and routes.

I

T ministry seeks fresh PSDP funding for Karachi IT Park



The Ministry of Information Technology has requested fresh PSDP funding of Rs11.5 billion for the Karachi IT Park in FY 2026-27, aiming to continue a project delayed for three years due to design objections and land approval issues. The IT Park, covering 111,000 sq meters near Karachi airport, seeks to boost technology, innovation, and the startup ecosystem, following the Islamabad IT Park model. Previous tenders to hire a Korean contractor failed, but authorities plan to float a third round.

Analysis:

Delays in approvals and lack of bids have slowed the project, impacting its financial and physical progress. Renewed funding and the upcoming tender offer a chance to revitalize the initiative, reflecting Pakistan's strategic focus on technology-driven economic growth and infrastructure development.

Way Forward:

- Monitor financial and physical progress closely to meet the six-year completion timeline and control costs.
- Coordinate with federal, provincial authorities, and private investors to accelerate development and operational efficiency.
- Ensure the park supports startups, tech companies, and innovation hubs, strengthening Karachi's role in Pakistan's digital economy.

SECURITY & LAW AND ORDER

Over 450 Afghan fighters killed as cross-border clashes continue



Cross-border clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan intensified as Pakistani forces expanded Operation Ghazab lil-Haq. The Information Minister reported 464 Afghan Taliban personnel killed, over 665 injured, and 188 checkpoints destroyed. Operations targeted multiple locations across Afghanistan including Bagram air base, Khugyani base in Nangarhar, and ammunition depots in Jalalabad.

Analysis:

This dramatic escalation marks a fundamental shift in Pakistan's approach toward the Afghan interim government, moving from diplomatic engagement to sustained kinetic action against terrorist sanctuaries inside Afghanistan. The scale of operations signals a deliberate strategy to degrade the Taliban's capacity to shelter and support anti-Pakistan militant groups. This operation carries significant risks: potential for prolonged conflict along the porous border, humanitarian fallout affecting border communities, and further strain on Pakistan's relations with the Afghan Taliban.

Way Forward:

- Engage in robust diplomatic outreach with actors such as China/ UN to explain Pakistan's security rationale of self-defence against terrorism.
- Develop a comprehensive border management strategy that combines military operations with long-term solutions e.g. surveillance and community engagement.
- Prepare for potential humanitarian consequences by coordinating with provincial disaster management authorities to assist displaced families and ensure essential services in affected border areas.

Punjab records 32pc drop in crime



Punjab has recorded a 32 percent decline in overall crime, according to official statistics released by the provincial government. The reduction spans multiple categories including street crime, burglary, and violent offenses. Authorities attribute the improvement to enhanced policing measures, modern surveillance systems, and targeted operations against criminal networks.

Analysis:

The significant crime reduction reflects positively on law enforcement reforms and administrative prioritization of public safety in Punjab. The integration of technology and data-driven policing particularly with help from the safe city initiative appears to be yielding measurable results; enhancing citizen confidence in state institutions.

Way Forward:

- Sustain investment in modern surveillance infrastructure and expand Safe City projects to additional districts for comprehensive coverage.
- Conduct regular data analysis to identify emerging crime patterns and deploy resources proactively rather than reactively.
- Ensure accountability mechanisms remain robust to prevent complacency and maintain performance standards across the police force.

SECURITY AND LAW & ORDER

Security official rubbishes claim Pakistan is likely 'to be next target'



A senior Pakistani security official rejected claims that Pakistan could be the next target in regional tensions, stating comparisons with Iran are misleading due to different military, political, and foreign policy dynamics. The official emphasized Pakistan's balanced diplomacy and strong relations with partners including China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. He reaffirmed Pakistan's capability to defend its sovereignty and confirmed that counter-terrorism efforts under Operation Ghazab-ul-Haq will continue based on developments involving the Afghan Taliban.

Analysis

The statement aims to counter regional security speculation and reassure both domestic and international audiences about Pakistan's strategic stability. By highlighting balanced diplomacy and strong military readiness, the government seeks to project deterrence and maintain regional partnerships. Continued counter-terrorism operations also signal pressure on the Afghan Taliban to curb militant groups operating near the border. Overall, the message reinforces Pakistan's commitment to protecting sovereignty while avoiding escalation in regional conflicts.

Way Forward:

- Continue targeted operations like Operation Ghazab-ul-Haq to dismantle terrorist networks and their supporting infrastructure.
- Pakistan should continue its balanced foreign policy by maintaining constructive relations with regional and global partners including China, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to promote regional stability.
- Develop clear communication strategies to address misperceptions and propaganda that may undermine Pakistan's security image.

India, Afghanistan shown glimpse of Pak power: president



President Asif Ali Zardari, in his ninth address to the joint session of Parliament, emphasized Pakistan's resolve to protect its sovereignty against threats from India and Afghanistan, particularly targeting terrorist groups like TTP, BLA, and Al-Qaeda. He highlighted recent military operations, including 'Maarka-e-Haq' and 'Ghazab Lil Haq', asserting Pakistan's readiness for defense while calling for dialogue and regional peace. Zardari also addressed economic stability, provincial autonomy, water security, and Pakistan's diplomatic stance on Kashmir, Palestine, and regional conflicts.

Analysis:

The address reinforced Pakistan's strategic posture and military deterrence while projecting a strong diplomatic narrative. Zardari balanced assertive security measures with calls for dialogue, highlighting Pakistan's emphasis on sovereignty, constitutional governance, and regional stability. The speech underlined the interconnection between national security, regional diplomacy, and domestic governance, portraying a united front amid external and internal challenges.

Way Forward:

- Maintain strict border security to prevent any domestic or foreign groups from destabilizing Pakistan.
- Prioritize dialogue with India, Afghanistan, and other regional players to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Promote negotiations, respect for international law, and cooperation with Gulf nations, Iran, and Afghanistan.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

No justification for attacks on GCC states, says Dar



Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar condemned Iran's missile strikes on Gulf countries, calling them violations of sovereignty and urging immediate de-escalation. He emphasized Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with regional and international partners to restore stability, while reaffirming the defensive nature of ongoing cross-border operations against terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan. Islamabad stressed it has only one demand of Kabul: to prevent TTP, BLA, and ISKP from attacking Pakistan from Afghan soil.

Analysis:

The briefing highlights Pakistan's dual approach of defensive military action and active diplomacy, balancing national security with regional stability. It underscores Islamabad's strategic ties with Gulf states, conditional posture toward Afghanistan, and commitment to international law, signaling restraint while maintaining readiness to respond to threats.

Way Forward:

- Continue active engagement with regional and international partners to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East and promote dialogue and restraint.
- Maintain and reinforce defence, economic, and political ties with Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, ensuring mutual security and stability.
- Counter misinformation and reassure the international community that Pakistan's actions are defensive, lawful, and aimed at national and regional security.

Palestinian envoy withdraws from UNGA presidency bid



Palestinian Ambassador Riyadh Mansour withdrew his bid for the UN General Assembly presidency due to procedural constraints, as the Asia-Pacific Group backed Bangladesh as its consensus candidate. Separately, US First Lady Melania Trump presided over a UN Security Council session on education and technology in conflict zones, marking an unusual but procedurally valid event.

Analysis:

The developments highlight the influence of regional group consensus on UN leadership elections and reflect shifting diplomatic dynamics. The Security Council session underscores the US's active engagement in global governance, even using symbolic leadership to emphasize thematic priorities like education and conflict resolution.

Way Forward:

- Use UN platforms to reinforce ties with Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern countries, building alliances that enhance Pakistan's influence in multilateral decision-making.
- Advocate for the welfare of Pakistanis abroad and highlight Pakistan's role in promoting stability and human development in conflict-affected regions.
- Collaborate with UN initiatives like the Security Council session chaired by Melania Trump to promote Pakistan's programs on education access, digital inclusion, and resilience in conflict-affected areas.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan offers to help with Iran-US talks



Pakistan has offered to facilitate Iran-US talks to de-escalate violence following US and Israeli strikes in Iran, with Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar affirming Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy. Pakistan evacuated hundreds of nationals from Iran while maintaining that it will not be drawn into regional conflict. Political leaders emphasized diplomacy, protection of Pakistani citizens, and balanced foreign policy toward Gulf countries and Afghanistan.

Analysis:

Pakistan is pursuing a cautious, diplomatic approach to safeguard its national interests, protect citizens abroad, and maintain regional stability. By advocating dialogue and restraint, Islamabad positions itself as a neutral mediator while reaffirming strategic commitments to allies, illustrating a balance between international engagement and domestic security priorities.

Way Forward:

- Maintain neutrality to prevent Pakistan from being drawn into the regional military conflict, preserving internal and external security.
- Enhance Pakistan's readiness for humanitarian, security, and economic contingencies resulting from regional instability.
- Use forums such as the UN to advocate for restraint, dialogue, and adherence to international law, positioning Pakistan as a responsible regional actor.

'Totally stupid' move to attack during talks, says Iran's UN envoy



Iran's UN envoy Ali Bahreini condemned the US strike on Iran during ongoing negotiations as a "totally stupid decision" that undermined Gulf diplomacy. He clarified that Iran had not reached out to the US for talks and emphasized that Iran's military actions target only US bases, not regional neighbors, framing them as self-defense rather than reprisal. Bahreini criticized Washington and Israel for sabotaging diplomacy and highlighted Iran's commitment to restraint toward civilians.

Analysis:

The statement underscores Tehran's attempt to control the narrative, presenting itself as a responsible actor while blaming external forces for escalation. It signals a diplomatic and strategic positioning to maintain regional legitimacy and avoid broader conflict, while reinforcing Iran's deterrence posture against the US.

Way Forward:

- Ensure the safety and evacuation of Pakistanis in Iran and neighboring regions, prioritizing their repatriation through secure land and air routes
- Advocate for Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy while discouraging nuclear proliferation, aligning with Pakistan's non-proliferation stance.
- Leverage Pakistan's diplomatic influence in multilateral forums, such as the UN, to promote conflict resolution and strengthen Pakistan's image as a constructive regional actor.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

US & Israel strike Qom leadership council



US and Israeli strikes targeted the Assembly of Experts building in Qom, a key institution responsible for electing Iran's next supreme leader. Iranian media reported severe damage but stated the building was "not in use." The fourth day strikes have reached the overall death toll of 787. Meanwhile, Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will be laid to rest in Mashhad.

Analysis:

The symbolic targeting of the Assembly of Experts represents a strike at the heart of Iran's succession mechanism. This move aims to create uncertainty within Iran at a critical moment following Khamenei's death. However it reflects the lack of US understanding of Iranian political successions which are intact to lead the state at a critical juncture.

Way Forward:

- US' impulsive behaviour reflects limited bandwidth in managing the conflict hence Pakistan should diplomatically lead to resolve the conflict.
- Pakistan must reconsider its relations and strategically map out its position in order to sustain its sovereignty in pursuing international relations.
- Develop an efficient strategy for the Pak-Iranian border to prevent any escalation into Pakistan.

Trump has no realistic plan for Iran's future



A report has concluded that the Trump administration lacks a coherent or realistic strategy for post-conflict Iran, despite ongoing US-Israeli military operations. The assessment highlights contradictions in US messaging, with President Trump suggesting "someone from within" should lead Iran while Secretary of State Rubio offers differing justifications for the invasion. The absence of a clear political endgame raises concerns about prolonged instability.

Analysis:

The absence of a realistic political framework for post-conflict Iran suggests military action is outpacing diplomatic strategy, risking a power vacuum or prolonged chaos. Contradictory statements from US leadership indicate internal policy divisions, undermining credibility and effective planning. Considering the escalation of conflict from Iran to the region, the US is not prepared to manage the crisis.

Way Forward:

- Pakistan should engage regional states in the OIC to find a ground for diplomatic intervention that can help resolve the conflict.
- Coordinate with Chinese counterparts for mutually led diplomatic engagement; it will help reflect Pakistan's commitment for regional security and stability.
- Pakistan must develop a regional security strategy to be better equipped in matters of security, energy, diaspora etc for future conflicts.

POLICY NUGGETS

1 Trump's Shifting Iran War Narrative Fuels Strategic Uncertainty

Impact

Increases geopolitical uncertainty and risks further destabilizing regional security and global energy markets.

Recommendation

prioritize diplomatic engagement and crisis-management mechanisms to prevent escalation and protect global economic stability.

“In war, the first casualty is truth.”— Hiram Johnson

2 IMF Endorses Pakistan's Reform Progress but Flags Structural Risks

Impact

Signals growing macroeconomic stability but underscores the need for sustained fiscal discipline and structural reforms to maintain recovery.

Recommendation

Accelerate tax administration reforms, SOE restructuring, and expenditure rationalization to consolidate stabilization gains.

“Stability is not the absence of crisis but the presence of strong institutions.”— Christine Lagarde

3 Trade Deficit Surge Signals Renewed Pressure on External Accounts

Impact

reflects weakening export momentum and rising imports, increasing pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

Recommendation

Strengthen export competitiveness through industrial policy, diversification of export markets, and targeted import substitution in strategic sectors. “Exports are the engine of growth.”— Lee Kuan Yew”

4 Chinese firm eyes \$10bn investment in Pakistan.

Impact

Strengthen industrial capacity, technology transfer, and economic growth in strategic sectors.

Recommendation

Ensure transparent investment frameworks, regulatory stability, and technology partnerships to maximise long-term economic benefit.

“Development is hard Truth” — Deng Xiaoping

5 Education funding crisis threatens learning outcomes

Impact

Reveals a deep learning crisis, weak public investment, human capital formation, and long-term economic productivity.

Recommendation

Increase education spending by prioritising teacher quality, foundational literacy programmes, and effective learning assessments.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” —Nelson Mandela

6 Punjab launches Rehmat Card for widows and orphans

Impact

Improves financial security for vulnerable households and supports widows in achieving economic independence.

Recommendation

Ensure transparent beneficiary selection, efficient digital access, and complementary livelihood programmes for long-term social impact.

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity; it is an act of justice”— Nelson Mandela

7 Parliament questions internet firewall and digital security measures

Impact

Highlights growing concerns over transparency in digital infrastructure policies, affecting public trust and digital freedom.

Recommendation

Provide clearer communication and parliamentary oversight on cybersecurity initiatives to balance national security with digital rights.

“The Web is for everyone.” —Tim Berners-Lee

8 Salaried class pays more income tax than key economic sectors

Impact

Highlights structural inequities in Pakistan's tax system, potentially weakening public trust in fiscal fairness.

Recommendation

Broaden the tax base by improving compliance among under-taxed sectors such as retail, exports, and real estate.

“The subjects of every state ought to contribute toward the support of the government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their abilities.” —Adam Smith

9 Pakistan raises concerns over India-Canada uranium deal

Impact

Heightens strategic tensions in South Asia and raises concerns about nuclear balance and regional security.

Recommendation

Strengthen diplomatic engagement in international forums and advocate for non-discriminatory nuclear cooperation.

“The world was not meant to be a prison in which man awaits his execution by nuclear weapons.”— John F. Kennedy



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