



Weekly



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OVERVIEW



This week's *Policy Pulse* covers public health, governance reform, counterterrorism, and international diplomacy as Pakistan faces rising socio-economic and geopolitical pressure. The central theme is resilience: strengthening institutions, healthcare regulation, and diplomatic engagement while managing security, climate, and fiscal risks.

In health, abuse in rehabilitation centres exposed serious regulatory gaps. Mandatory HIV and hepatitis screening before surgeries signals a stronger preventive response to unsafe medical practices. Punjab's dialogue with UNICEF highlighted gaps in rural maternal and child healthcare, while Football4MentalHealth reflected growing attention to youth mental health.

In governance, Sindh's Domestic Workers Welfare Bill advanced labour protections for household workers. The National Assembly's AI-enabled system and digital transformation bills reflected a shift toward paperless governance and institutional modernisation. The Pakistan Governance Forum further stressed administrative reform and inter-provincial coordination, though implementation remains the key test.

Security developments were dominated by counterterrorism operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, reflecting continued militant resurgence and border pressures. The Federal Shariat Court's restoration of penalties for attempted suicide also highlighted tensions between religious jurisprudence, criminal law, and mental health policy.

Internationally, Pakistan's IMF agreement underscored continued reliance on externally driven fiscal reform. Rising US-Iran tensions and Field Marshal Asim Munir's Tehran visit highlighted Pakistan's growing mediation role. Gulf security concerns and fears of a "Super El Niño" exposed risks to energy and food security, while Pakistan continued advocating climate-resilient health systems at global forums.

The policy nuggets reinforce priorities of healthcare reform, governance modernisation, climate resilience, counterterrorism coordination, and balanced diplomacy. Overall, the week underscores the need for institutional preparedness, inclusive governance, and strategic resilience amid domestic and global uncertainty.

Strengthening institutions, healthcare regulation, and diplomatic engagement while managing security, climate, and fiscal risks.

HEALTH

S herry condemns ‘institutionalised abuse’ in rehabilitation centres



Senator Sherry Rehman condemned severe human rights abuses in rehabilitation centres, calling them “private detention centres” where vulnerable individuals face unlawful confinement, forced medication, and mistreatment. She demanded urgent legal reforms, stronger regulation, and accountability to end institutionalised abuse disguised as care.

Analysis:

The issue highlights deep weaknesses in Pakistan’s healthcare oversight and justice system, where poor regulation and weak implementation allow abuse to continue unchecked. It also reflects the misuse of medical institutions for profit and control, especially against vulnerable groups including women.

Way Forward:

- Establish strict monitoring and independent inspections of rehabilitation centres.
- Enforce stronger laws against unlawful detention and medical abuse.
- Improve accountability of licensing and health authorities.

H IV, hepatitis screening made mandatory before surgeries, invasive procedures



Pakistan’s Ministry of National Health Services has made HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C screening mandatory before all surgical and invasive medical procedures nationwide to curb rising infections. The decision follows alarming increases in HIV and hepatitis cases linked to unsafe medical practices and weak infection control.

Analysis:

The policy reflects a serious public health response to Pakistan’s growing burden of blood-borne diseases and highlights gaps in healthcare regulation and hygiene standards. It also shows the government’s shift toward preventive screening to reduce hospital-based transmission risks.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen infection prevention and control (IPC) standards in all healthcare facilities.
- Ensure strict regulation of blood transfusion services and injection safety practices.
- Train healthcare workers on hygiene protocols and safe surgical procedures.

HEALTH

Punjab, UNICEF Pakistan hold policy dialogue on maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition



On May 21, 2026, the Punjab government and UNICEF Pakistan convened a high-level policy dialogue to strengthen maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) services alongside nutrition programmes. Discussions focused on improving service delivery, data-driven planning, and addressing gaps in rural and underserved areas.

Analysis:

This policy dialogue reflects Punjab's continued focus on addressing persistently high maternal and child mortality and malnutrition rates despite being Pakistan's most populous and relatively developed province. The emphasis on data from MICS 2025 shows an evidence-based approach, but it also reveals gaps in service delivery, especially in rural areas, where access to quality antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and nutrition services remains uneven. The inclusion of WASH and digital tools highlights a welcome shift toward integrated, multi-sectoral solutions, yet implementation challenges such as funding constraints, staff capacity, and coordination between departments continue to limit impact.

Way Forward:

- Develop a time-bound provincial MNCH&N strategy with measurable targets and dedicated budget lines.
- Strengthen district-level monitoring using digital dashboards and regular performance reviews.
- Scale up community outreach through Lady Health Workers and local governments for better rural coverage.

PFF and UN Pakistan unite to promote mental health through football



The Pakistan Football Federation and United Nations in Pakistan launched the "Football4MentalHealth" initiative in Islamabad to raise awareness about youth mental health. The programme uses football to promote wellbeing, inclusion, emotional resilience, and open conversations around mental health. It aims to engage young people through sport while reducing stigma around seeking support.

Analysis:

The initiative reflects growing recognition that mental health awareness must move beyond hospitals and into schools, communities, and youth spaces. However, awareness campaigns will have limited impact unless linked with accessible counselling, referral pathways, and trained mental health support systems.

Way Forward:

- Link sports-based mental health initiatives with school counselling, community health services, and referral systems.
- Train coaches, teachers, and youth volunteers to identify early signs of mental distress and guide young people toward support.
- Expand public awareness campaigns through sports federations, schools, and local clubs to reduce stigma around mental health.

GOVERNANCE

Sindh Assembly passes bill for legal cover to household workers



The Sindh Assembly passed the Domestic Workers Welfare Bill 2025, granting legal protection and labour rights to household workers, including fixed working hours, maternity leave, medical care, and paid leave. The law also bans child domestic labour below 16 years and establishes dispute resolution mechanisms for worker protection.

Analysis:

The bill is a significant step toward recognising domestic workers as formal labour contributors and addressing long-standing exploitation and invisibility in the informal sector. However, effective implementation, monitoring, and enforcement remain critical challenges, particularly in low-income households where labour violations often go unreported.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen complaint and legal support systems for vulnerable workers, especially women and children.
- Introduce social security, health insurance, and minimum wage protections for domestic workers.
- Improve coordination between labour departments, police, and human rights institutions for implementation.

N A launches AI-enabled parliamentary system



The National Assembly of Pakistan has launched an AI-enabled parliamentary system to modernize legislative processes through digital tools, aiming for a paperless, efficient, and secure governance system. The initiative ensures on-premises data control and is designed to improve transparency, workflow, and decision-making in parliament.

Analysis:

This development reflects Pakistan's shift toward digital governance and institutional modernization, enhancing efficiency and transparency in lawmaking. However, its success will depend on effective implementation, training of lawmakers, and long-term digital infrastructure sustainability.

Way Forward:

- Provide digital training for Members of National Assembly (MNAs) and staff.
- Ensure full integration of AI tools in legislative research and documentation.
- Maintain transparency and accountability in AI-driven parliamentary decisions.

GOVERNANCE

Pakistan Governance Forum 2026 discusses international relations and reforms



On May 22, 2026, the Pakistan Governance Forum focused on “Navigating International Relations Amidst Changing Geo-Politics,” with Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and other leaders emphasising digital governance, institutional reforms, and inter-provincial coordination.

Analysis:

The forum highlighted Pakistan’s efforts to modernise governance structures amid economic and geopolitical challenges. Discussions stressed the need for stronger parliamentary oversight and digital tools, but implementation gaps and political polarisation continue to hinder progress on key reforms like the 28th Constitutional Amendment proposals.

Way Forward:

- Accelerate rollout of digital governance platforms with robust training for public officials.
- Promote bipartisan consensus on constitutional and administrative reforms.
- Establish independent monitoring mechanisms to ensure transparent delivery of governance initiatives.

National Assembly advances digital transformation bills



In mid-to-late May 2026 sessions (including around May 19–22), the National Assembly passed or debated bills aimed at transforming Pakistan into a digital nation, covering e-governance, virtual assets regulation, and paperless parliamentary processes.

Analysis:

These legislative moves signal a strong push toward efficiency and transparency in public institutions. Yet, concerns remain over data security, digital divide between urban and rural areas, and capacity building for lawmakers and staff to fully utilise new technologies without creating new vulnerabilities.

Way Forward:

- Prioritise cybersecurity frameworks alongside digital rollout.
- Bridge the digital divide through targeted infrastructure and literacy programmes in underserved regions.
- Conduct regular performance audits of new digital systems for accountability.

SECURITY AND LAW & ORDER

S hariat Court reverses move to decriminalise death by suicide



The Federal Shariat Court ruled that decriminalising suicide attempts was against Islamic injunctions and restored Section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code, making attempted suicide a punishable offence again. The court argued that suicide is prohibited in Islam and that removing punishment could encourage “anti-life acts.”

Analysis:

The decision reflects the strong influence of Islamic jurisprudence on Pakistan’s legal system and highlights the tension between religious law and modern mental health approaches. Critics may argue that criminalising suicide attempts could discourage vulnerable individuals from seeking psychological help and treatment.

Way Forward:

- Develop balanced policies combining Islamic principles with mental health rehabilitation.
- Expand mental health services, counselling, and suicide prevention programmes nationwide.
- Ensure humane legal procedures for suicide survivors instead of punitive treatment alone.

2 2 terrorists killed in N. Waziristan operation: ISPR



Security forces in North Waziristan killed 22 terrorists during an intelligence-based operation as part of ongoing counter-terrorism efforts under the Operation Azm-e-Istehkam. The operation targeted militants involved in attacks and destabilizing activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Analysis:

The incident reflects the continuing resurgence of militancy in border regions and Pakistan’s sustained military response to restore internal security. It also highlights the broader challenge of cross-border terrorism and the need for long-term regional coordination.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen border security and surveillance along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.
- Increase diplomatic pressure for action against militant sanctuaries across the border.
- Continue coordinated civil-military counter-terrorism operations with local community support.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Over 164,000 Pakistanis deported from Gulf in 5 years, NA told



The National Assembly of Pakistan was informed that over 164,000 Pakistanis were deported from Gulf countries between 2021 and 2026, with Saudi Arabia recording the highest number of deportations. The session also highlighted rising aviation fuel costs due to regional tensions, which have increased airline operating expenses and air ticket prices.

Analysis:

The issue reflects growing challenges related to overseas employment, migration management, and Pakistan's international labour reputation in Gulf states. It also shows how geopolitical instability in the Middle East directly affects Pakistan's aviation sector, economy, and expatriate workforce.

Way Forward:

- Improve skill development and legal awareness programmes for overseas workers.
- Strengthen diplomatic coordination with Gulf countries on labour and immigration issues.
- Introduce stricter screening and monitoring systems to reduce illegal migration and document fraud.

Pakistan, IMF agree on macroeconomic framework



Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund have agreed on a macroeconomic framework for the 2026-27 budget, projecting 4.1% GDP growth and around 8.6% inflation, alongside a 2% of GDP primary surplus target. The plan also includes increased provincial revenue measures, tax reforms, and fiscal coordination to meet IMF programme goals.

Analysis:

The agreement reflects Pakistan's continued reliance on IMF-backed fiscal discipline to stabilize growth, inflation, and external balances. However, it also highlights structural pressures such as high inflation risks, revenue shortfalls, and strong IMF influence over domestic economic policy.

Way Forward:

- Control inflation through stable monetary and energy pricing policies.
- Reduce dependency on IMF by improving export performance and remittance stability.
- Enhance fiscal coordination between federal and provincial governments for sustainable budgeting.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

T rump gives Iran 'limited period' to make deal



The article reports escalating US–Iran tensions, where US President Donald Trump has set a short deadline for Iran to accept a nuclear deal, warning of possible military action while continuing sanctions and diplomatic pressure. The situation is marked by threats, counter-statements from Iran, and ongoing international efforts to prevent further escalation.

Analysis:

The crisis reflects heightened geopolitical instability in the Middle East driven by nuclear non-proliferation disputes, military posturing, and economic sanctions. It also shows how global security dynamics are shaped by US pressure diplomacy, Iranian resistance, and fragile regional alliances.

Way Forward:

- Maintain a neutral and balanced diplomatic stance to avoid entanglement in US–Iran tensions.
- Support regional de-escalation through multilateral forums like OIC and UN.
- Protect Pakistan's economic interests, especially energy supplies and trade routes.

S uper El Niño' fuels fears of global climate, food crises



Scientists warn that a possible “Super El Niño” may develop in 2026 with a high probability, potentially triggering extreme global weather events such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, and crop failures. It could severely disrupt climate systems, especially monsoon patterns in South Asia, increasing risks of food and water insecurity.

Analysis:

The situation highlights growing climate instability driven by rising ocean and global temperatures, posing serious threats to agriculture, livelihoods, and economic stability. South Asia, including Pakistan, is highly vulnerable due to its dependence on monsoon rains and limited climate resilience capacity.

Way Forward :

- Pakistan should strengthen disaster preparedness and early warning systems for floods and heatwaves.
- Pakistan should invest in climate-resilient agriculture, including drought- and heat-resistant crops.
- Pakistan should improve water storage infrastructure and irrigation efficiency to manage scarcity.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan condemns drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and UAE



On May 18, 2026, Pakistan strongly condemned recent drone attacks targeting Saudi Arabia and the UAE's Barakah nuclear plant, reaffirming support for regional stability and allies. The Foreign Office described the attacks as serious threats to regional peace and security, while reiterating Pakistan's firm commitment to the safety and sovereignty of Gulf nations.

Analysis:

The statements highlight Pakistan's strategic balancing act in the Gulf amid heightened tensions. Such incidents risk disrupting energy supplies and remittances critical to Pakistan's economy, while testing its diplomatic relationships with key partners. This condemnation also helps Islamabad maintain strong ties with its traditional Gulf allies at a time when it is simultaneously playing a mediation role between the US and Iran.

Way Forward:

- Deepen security cooperation frameworks with Gulf countries.
- Diversify energy import routes to mitigate Strait of Hormuz-related risks.
- Actively support multilateral de-escalation efforts in the Middle East.

US-Iran deal in sight as Pakistan's CDF wraps up Tehran visit



On May 24, 2026, Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir concluded a two-day visit to Tehran after talks reportedly produced "encouraging progress" toward a US-Iran understanding. ISPR said the engagements were part of Pakistan's mediation efforts, while President Trump claimed a peace MoU had been "largely negotiated." Iranian officials also described the accord as being near finalisation.

Analysis:

The development raises Pakistan's profile as a mediator in a major regional crisis. However, remaining gaps, especially Washington's demand for maximum concessions, mean the deal remains fragile and could still affect Pakistan's energy security, border stability, and diplomatic credibility.

Way Forward:

- Sustain high-level backchannel diplomacy with both Iran and the United States.
- Maintain strict neutrality to preserve Pakistan's credibility as a mediator.
- Coordinate with China, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye to support regional buy-in and protect Pakistan's energy and security interests.

POLICY NUGGETS

1 Pakistan launches targeted polio drive in 79 high-risk districts

Impact: Strengthens Pakistan's polio eradication efforts by improving immunisation coverage in vulnerable areas.

Recommendation: Strengthen community outreach and real-time monitoring in high-risk districts to address vaccine refusals.

"The greatest wealth is health." – Virgil

4 Government moves to settle K-Electric, IPP disputes to cut circular debt

Impact: Reduces Pakistan's annual circular debt accumulation by up to Rs300 billion improves energy sector liquidity and easing fiscal pressure on the government.

Recommendation: Accelerate power sector reforms, including loss reduction and tariff rationalisation.

"Sustainable energy policy requires not only supply, but sound governance and financial discipline." – Fatih Birol

7 Pakistan Intensifies Diplomacy to Prevent US-Iran Escalation

Impact: Pakistan's diplomacy highlights its growing role in regional de-escalation efforts.

Recommendation: Maintain balanced engagement to support regional stability.

"The art of diplomacy is not choosing between war and peace, but between different paths to peace." – Henry Kissinger

2 IMF pushes Pakistan to strengthen NAB transparency and anti-corruption reforms

Impact: Improves governance transparency, strengthens investor confidence, and reduces corruption vulnerabilities.

Recommendation: Strengthen provincial anti-corruption bodies with digital investigation tools and independent oversight mechanisms.

"Corruption is the enemy of development, and of good governance. It must be got rid of." – Kofi Annan

5 Pakistan reacts to Indian army chief's remarks, warns against regional escalation

Impact: Risks heightening diplomatic tensions, undermining regional stability, and discouraging economic cooperation.

Recommendation: Intensify diplomatic engagement through regional and international forums while maintaining military restraint.

"Jaw-jaw is better than war-war." – Winston Churchill

8 Senate Reaffirms Strategic Partnership with China and Support for CPEC

Impact: Renewed support for CPEC reinforces Pakistan's commitment to regional connectivity and economic cooperation with China.

Recommendation: Accelerate transparent implementation of CPEC projects to maximise economic gains.

"The China-Pakistan relationship is not a transaction – it is a vision. CPEC is the physical expression of that vision: a corridor that connects civilisations, not just economies." – Pakistan Senate Resolution on CPEC

3 Balochistan to receive additional 100MW electricity import from Iran

Impact: Helps ease power shortages, supports port-related economic activity, and improves energy access in underserved coastal districts.

Recommendation: Reduce long-term dependence on imported electricity while ensuring stable supply for Gwadar's industrial and port development.

"Energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability." – Ban Ki-moon

6 Debate grows over possible 28th Constitutional Amendment and provincial powers.

Impact: Affect provincial governance, development spending, and Centre-province relations.

Recommendation: Should involve broad political consensus and transparent parliamentary debate.

"Government works best when power is shared and decisions are made closest to the people." – Ronald Reagan

9 Lawmakers Urge NFC Reform Amid Rapid Population Growth Concerns

Impact: Population-driven resource distribution is increasing fiscal and development pressures.

Recommendation: Align NFC allocations with development and revenue indicators.

"The 18th Amendment was the second independence of Pakistan – it returned power from the centre to the federating units, and from the state to the people." – Raza Rabbani



Editorial Team

Dr. Naveed Elahi
Naeema Naeem
Jahanzeb Waheed

Editorial Assistants

Saffa Amjad
Arhum Kammran Shah
Laiba Tanveer
Abdul Wakeel

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

Email: polycypulse.nipp@nspp.gov.pk

