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SOCIO-ECONOMIC



Water & Digital Equity

HEALTH



Health Governance & Critical Care

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Strengthening

**institutional resilience,
accountable governance,
public-service delivery,
climate and economic
security, and diplomatic
stability amid growing
domestic and regional
challenges.**

This week's Policy Pulse highlights persistent challenges in governance, economic resilience, public health, climate vulnerability, and regional security, alongside efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and public-service delivery. A recurring theme is the gap between policy commitments and effective implementation.

In governance, concerns over continued torture despite Pakistan's anti-torture legislation, political tensions surrounding the AJK elections, and reforms in Haj and digital consular services underline the importance of accountability, institutional oversight, transparency, and citizen-centred service delivery. Digital reforms offer opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce administrative delays, but their success will depend on strong safeguards, accessibility, and effective monitoring.

Water, energy and climate pressures remain significant. Improved reservoir levels provide temporary relief for agriculture and hydropower, while mangrove restoration and urban greening can strengthen climate resilience. However, rising circular debt, refinery-sector challenges, heat risks, and dependence on imported fuel demonstrate the need for long-term energy reforms, greater investment in renewable alternatives, efficient water management, and climate-adaptive infrastructure.

In health, shortages of critical-care equipment, concerns surrounding HIV and TB programme governance, and expanded disease screening highlight the need to strengthen Pakistan's health-system capacity. Sustainable improvements require not only equipment and funding but also trained health workers, effective surveillance, transparent financing, and accessible preventive care.

On the international front, escalating tensions in the Middle East, risks to maritime trade and energy routes, and the deteriorating situation in the West Bank reinforce the importance of diplomatic engagement and regional de-escalation. Pakistan's expanding defence and economic cooperation with Kuwait and its engagement in Gulf maritime security also demonstrate the need to balance strategic partnerships with economic interests and avoid deeper military entanglement.

The Policy Nuggets complement these broader developments by highlighting practical measures from energy and fiscal reforms to food security, preventive healthcare, digital agriculture, urban greening, and climate adaptation. Overall, the developments point to a central policy priority: strengthening institutional capacity and accountability while building economic, health, environmental, and diplomatic resilience.

HRCP calls for accountability as abuse persists despite anti-torture law



The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has raised concerns that torture and cruel treatment continue despite the 2022 anti-torture law due to weak implementation, inadequate safeguards and limited accountability. Experts called for stronger procedures, independent oversight and alignment with international human rights standards.

Analysis

The persistence of torture highlights a gap between Pakistan's legal framework and its enforcement, particularly in detention and law-enforcement settings. Weak accountability and inadequate oversight can undermine public trust in state institutions and Pakistan's commitments to human rights.

Way Forward

- Establish clear protocols for police and prison authorities to prevent, document and investigate allegations of torture, with meaningful penalties for violations.
- Ratify Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) and establish an effective national preventive mechanism with authority to conduct regular and unannounced inspections of detention facilities.
- Bring detention and internment facilities under clear civilian legal frameworks, strengthen safeguards against arbitrary detention and ensure access to effective legal and judicial remedies.

Govt unveils Haj Policy 2027-30 with digital reforms, four-year registration system



The federal government has introduced the Haj Policy 2027–2030, featuring a four-year registration and digital waiting-list system, integrated online management, and greater transparency in payments, procurement and complaints. The policy also shifts the government toward regulation and oversight while increasing private-sector participation.

Analysis

The reforms could make Haj administration more transparent, predictable and efficient by reducing manual processes and introducing digital monitoring and third-party evaluation. However, effective implementation will depend on strong oversight of private operators, protection of pilgrims' funds and ensuring that elderly or digitally less-literate pilgrims can access the new system.

Way Forward

- Strengthen digital accountability through real-time monitoring, transparent contracts and independent audits of government and private Haj operators.
- Ensure accessibility by maintaining physical facilitation centres and assistance for elderly, rural and digitally less-literate pilgrims.
- Enforce service standards through strict penalties for non-compliant operators and regular post-Haj evaluations based on pilgrims' feedback.

Digital consular services for overseas Pakistanis



Pakistan is expanding digital consular services for overseas citizens through online document attestation, e-payments, courier services and QR-based complaint registration. The government is also integrating databases of HEC, IBCC, NADRA and the National Police Bureau to speed up verification and attestation.

Analysis

The reforms can improve the efficiency, accessibility and transparency of consular services while reducing processing time and opportunities for administrative delays. For Pakistan, better digital services can strengthen engagement with overseas Pakistanis, who are an important source of remittances and international economic linkages.

Way Forward

- Complete the proposed mobile application and integrate major consular services into a single secure platform.
- Ensure robust cybersecurity, privacy safeguards and inter-agency data protection as government databases become increasingly interconnected.
- Provide digital services alongside physical alternatives, strengthen complaint tracking and regularly evaluate missions to ensure consistent service delivery worldwide.

Allies' rift continues to widen as AJK polls enter 2nd phase



Tensions between the PPP and PML-N have intensified over alleged irregularities in the first phase of the AJK elections, with talks failing to resolve disputes before the second phase. The rift has prompted demands for re-polling in some constituencies and raised concerns about the stability of the federal coalition.

Analysis:

The parties should be mindful of the fact that allegations of electoral manipulation can deepen mistrust between coalition partners and undermine confidence in the electoral process. Continued political confrontation could complicate federal-AJK coordination and weaken political stability, while the proposed truth and reconciliation commission offers a potential institutional avenue for addressing grievances.

Way Forward:

- Ensure impartial electoral review: Address disputed constituencies through transparent legal and electoral mechanisms, including re-polling where formally warranted.
- Strengthen coalition dialogue: PPP and PML-N leadership should resolve disputes through institutional negotiations rather than public accusations that could further destabilise the coalition.
- Promote institutional reconciliation: Consider the proposed truth and reconciliation mechanism through a legally sound, inclusive process involving AJK, federal authorities and relevant stakeholders.

Pakistan's major reservoirs surpass 8MAF storage mark



Pakistan's three major reservoirs have crossed 8 million acre-feet (MAF) of stored water, reaching 61.2% of their combined live storage capacity amid improved monsoon inflows. Higher flows in the Indus, Chenab and Kabul rivers have strengthened water availability, although Jhelum inflows remain comparatively low.

Analysis

Improved reservoir levels provide greater water security for Kharif agriculture, irrigation and hydropower generation, while downstream releases are helping meet provincial requirements. However, uneven river inflows and Pakistan's limited storage capacity highlight continued vulnerability to changing rainfall and water availability.

Way Forward

- Expand water-storage capacity by accelerating the development and rehabilitation of reservoirs and dams to improve resilience against floods and water shortages.
- Strengthen water management and monitoring through accurate forecasting, real-time river data and coordinated provincial water distribution.
- Improve water-use efficiency in agriculture through modern irrigation, conservation practices and climate-resilient cropping to reduce pressure on Pakistan's limited water resources.

Mangroves key to climate resilience and blue economy, says minister



Pakistan's mangroves play a critical role in protecting coastal areas from erosion, flooding and storm surges while supporting fisheries and coastal livelihoods. The government has called for their restoration to strengthen climate resilience and develop the country's blue economy, including through potential carbon-market opportunities.

Analysis

Mangrove degradation caused by pollution, encroachment and reduced Indus flows threatens coastal ecosystems, fisheries and climate resilience. Their restoration could simultaneously provide environmental protection, support coastal communities and generate economic opportunities through fisheries, carbon credits and sustainable marine activities.

Way Forward

- Scale up mangrove restoration and protection in the Indus Delta and Balochistan through coordinated federal, provincial and local conservation programmes.
- Ensure adequate environmental flows into the Indus Delta while controlling pollution and encroachment to protect mangrove ecosystems and coastal livelihoods.
- Develop a sustainable blue-economy strategy by establishing credible carbon-credit mechanisms and promoting sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and eco-tourism.

Pak women far behind in tech and economy, shows Freedom Report



Pakistan's latest Freedom Report highlights a significant gender digital divide, with women substantially behind men in smartphone ownership, internet use, social media engagement, mobile wallets and digital/freelance work. Women also face widespread online harassment, with a large proportion of reported cybercrime complaints remaining unresolved.

Analysis

The digital gender gap limits women's access to employment, entrepreneurship, education and financial inclusion, reinforcing broader economic inequalities. Although digital platforms can provide women with opportunities to overcome mobility and workplace barriers, inadequate access, digital skills and online safety remain major constraints.

Way Forward

- Expand women-focused digital literacy and skills programmes, particularly in underserved and low-income communities, to increase participation in freelancing and the digital economy.
- Improve affordable digital access by expanding reliable internet, smartphone access and digital financial services for women.
- Strengthen online protection and enforcement by improving cybercrime reporting mechanisms, investigation capacity and timely resolution of harassment cases.

Targeted fuel subsidy may return if Gulf tensions persist



The government may reintroduce targeted fuel subsidies if Gulf tensions continue to push up global oil prices, while maintaining its new daily petroleum pricing mechanism. Ogra will continue linking prices to international benchmarks, with the government arguing that deregulation can improve transparency and gradually reduce price shocks.

Analysis

This highlights the challenge of balancing market-based pricing, consumer protection and fiscal sustainability amid geopolitical volatility. While daily pricing can distribute international price shocks more gradually, prolonged high oil prices could increase inflation and transport costs, while broad subsidies could place additional pressure on Pakistan's limited fiscal space.

Way Forward

- Use targeted subsidies for low-income households and essential sectors rather than broad-based fuel subsidies.
- Ensure Ogra's pricing formula, taxes and petroleum margins are publicly disclosed and independently monitored.
- Accelerate renewable energy, public transport and energy-efficiency measures to reduce dependence on imported petroleum and exposure to global price shocks.

HIV, TB: ministry seeks end to Global Fund's ASP



Pakistan's health authorities are seeking the removal of the Global Fund's Additional Safeguard Policy (ASP), imposed in 2020 over concerns regarding HIV and tuberculosis programmes, governance and financial oversight. The Health Ministry says Pakistan has fulfilled the required conditions and is preparing an assessment to formally request its withdrawal.

Analysis

Removal of the ASP would indicate improved institutional capacity and governance of Pakistan's HIV and TB programmes and could strengthen government ownership of health initiatives. However, the decision will ultimately depend on the Global Fund's assessment of Pakistan's implementation, financial management and programme performance.

Way Forward

- Strengthen HIV and TB programme governance through transparent financial management, effective monitoring and clear institutional accountability.
- Maintain strong disease surveillance and treatment systems to improve early detection, treatment coverage and prevention of HIV and TB.
- Engage proactively with the Global Fund by providing credible evidence of reforms, meeting all remaining requirements and maintaining improvements after the ASP is withdrawn.

Persistent ventilator shortage undermines hospital services



Pakistan's public hospitals continue to face a persistent shortage of ventilators, with high costs, limited ICU capacity and a shortage of trained staff undermining critical care services. At PIMS, most ventilators are reportedly occupied, while rising patient numbers have further increased pressure on public hospitals.

Analysis

The shortage highlights broader weaknesses in Pakistan's critical-care infrastructure, including inadequate equipment, human-resource constraints and limited domestic production. Dependence on costly imported equipment and the absence of sustained investment in local manufacturing also leave the health system vulnerable during periods of high demand.

Way Forward

- The government should prioritise ventilators, ICU beds and related equipment in public hospitals, particularly in major referral centres facing persistent overcrowding.
- Pakistan should encourage public-private and international joint ventures to develop and manufacture reliable ventilators and other critical-care equipment domestically.
- Alongside purchasing equipment, authorities should invest in training and retaining intensivists, respiratory therapists, nurses and biomedical engineers to ensure ventilators can be safely and effectively operated.

I ran halts strikes as Trump gives talks ‘some space’



Iran has paused retaliatory attacks following the US suspension of air strikes, reviving prospects for diplomacy. The conflict continues to threaten regional stability, energy routes, and global oil supplies, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea.

Analysis

The temporary halt offers a narrow opportunity for renewed negotiations, but mutual distrust and continued regional military activity make escalation highly possible. Pakistan's involvement as a diplomatic mediator, alongside Qatar and Oman, gives Islamabad an opportunity to support de-escalation while protecting its own economic and security interests.

Way Forward

- Pakistan should continue facilitating dialogue between the concerned parties, working with Oman, Qatar and other regional actors to support a durable ceasefire and negotiated settlement.
- Pakistan should closely monitor developments around the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb, safeguard Pakistani-flagged shipping, and prepare contingency measures against disruptions to oil supplies and rising global energy prices.
- Islamabad should avoid being drawn into the military confrontation while maintaining constructive relations with Iran, the US, Gulf states and other regional partners, prioritising Pakistan's sovereignty, economic stability and regional peace.

Japan, Unicef strengthen collaboration on child rights in Pakistan



Japan and UNICEF have reaffirmed their long-standing partnership in Pakistan, supporting child rights through health, nutrition, education, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), child protection and polio eradication. Japan also provided \$6.48 million for UNICEF's post-2022 flood response in Sindh and Balochistan.

Analysis

The partnership strengthens Pakistan's capacity to protect vulnerable children and improve essential services, particularly in underserved and disaster-affected areas. Continued international support can also help Pakistan build more resilient systems for future health, climate and humanitarian emergencies.

Way Forward

- Pakistan should use international assistance to improve healthcare, nutrition, education, WASH and child-protection services, particularly in underserved districts.
- Federal and provincial authorities should integrate child-focused measures into disaster preparedness and response plans, ensuring essential services continue during floods and other emergencies.
- Pakistan should strengthen monitoring, coordination and transparency to ensure international funding produces measurable and sustainable improvements in children's wellbeing.

UN alarmed at ‘rapidly deteriorating’ situation in West Bank



The UN has warned of a rapidly deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the occupied West Bank, citing increasing settler violence, civilian casualties, displacement and damage to Palestinian homes and infrastructure. The UN has urged Israel to prevent settler violence and hold perpetrators accountable while also calling on Palestinians to reject violence.

Analysis

The escalation risks further destabilising the wider Middle East and undermining prospects for a peaceful political settlement. For Pakistan, the situation reinforces the need to maintain its longstanding diplomatic support for Palestinian rights and a peaceful, rules-based resolution while avoiding further regional escalation.

Way Forward

- Pakistan should continue raising the situation at the UN and other multilateral forums, supporting international efforts for civilian protection and a peaceful resolution based on international law.
- Pakistan should work with international humanitarian organisations to support assistance for displaced and vulnerable Palestinians, particularly in healthcare, food security and essential services.
- Islamabad should coordinate with regional and international partners to encourage restraint, accountability and renewed diplomatic efforts aimed at preventing further escalation across the Middle East.

Japanese population below 120 million for first time in decades



Japan's resident population has fallen below 120 million for the first time in 42 years, driven by a persistently low birth rate and an ageing population. The demographic decline is creating labour shortages, increasing social-security costs and shrinking the tax base, while foreign residents are reaching record levels.

Analysis

Japan's experience highlights the long-term economic and governance pressures created by demographic ageing and declining fertility. For Pakistan, which has a large and rapidly growing young population, the challenge is different: the country must convert its demographic dividend into productive employment, skills and economic growth before population pressures become a burden on public services and resources.

Way Forward

- Expand quality education, technical training, healthcare and digital skills to prepare Pakistan's growing youth population for future employment.
- Promote private-sector investment, entrepreneurship, freelancing and labour-intensive industries to absorb the expanding working-age population.
- Use reliable population data to plan for education, healthcare, housing, pensions and employment, while ensuring consistent policies across successive governments.

Pakistan hails ratification of defence pact with Kuwait



Kuwait has ratified the Pakistan-Kuwait Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2023, strengthening institutional defence ties through military training, joint exercises, personnel exchanges and technical cooperation. The two countries also agreed to expand cooperation in energy, trade, investment, agriculture, IT, education and health.

Analysis

The ratification strengthens Pakistan's strategic and defence partnership with Kuwait at a time of heightened Gulf security concerns. For Pakistan, deeper institutional and economic engagement with Kuwait can support regional security cooperation, protect the interests of its expatriate community and diversify partnerships and investment opportunities in the Gulf.

Way Forward

- Activate the joint military committee and annual protocols to translate the defence agreement into sustained training, exercises and institutional cooperation.
- Prioritise the newly agreed working groups on energy, trade, investment, agriculture and IT to attract Kuwaiti investment and increase bilateral trade.
- Maintain Pakistan's role as a constructive mediator in Gulf tensions while deepening coordination with Kuwait on regional peace, security and multilateral forums.

Riyadh unveils maritime alliance as war spreads



Saudi Arabia has proposed a multinational maritime defence coalition, backed by 14 countries including Pakistan, to protect shipping and energy routes across the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden amid escalating regional conflict. The initiative seeks to strengthen freedom of navigation and safeguard global trade and energy supplies.

Analysis

The widening conflict poses significant risks to Pakistan through disruptions to maritime trade, energy supplies and shipping routes connecting the Gulf with global markets. Pakistan's support for the coalition reflects its interest in regional maritime security, while requiring a careful balance between protecting its economic interests and avoiding deeper military involvement in the conflict.

Way Forward

- Strengthen naval surveillance and coordination with regional partners to protect Pakistani commercial and energy shipping.
- Develop contingency plans and alternative suppliers/routes to reduce vulnerability to disruptions in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb and Gulf.
- Support freedom of navigation and regional de-escalation while avoiding unnecessary military escalation and continuing diplomatic efforts for a peaceful resolution.

POWER SECTOR CIRCULAR DEBT CONTINUES TO RISE DESPITE GOVERNMENT CONTAINMENT EFFORTS.

Impact: Persistent circular debt threatens fiscal stability, energy sector sustainability, and investor confidence.

Recommendation: Accelerate power sector reforms by improving bill recovery, reducing transmission losses, and strengthening governance.

“GOOD GOVERNANCE IS THE FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC FINANCE.”
ÁNGEL GURRÍA

KARACHI INTENSIFIES WATER CHLORINATION TO COMBAT NAEGLERIA THREAT.

Impact: Strengthens preventive public health measures and reduces the risk of deadly waterborne infections.

Recommendation: Combine chlorination with continuous water quality monitoring and public awareness campaigns.

“SAFE WATER IS THE FOUNDATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH.”
GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

PAKISTAN FACES GROWING HEAT RISKS DUE TO LIMITED ACCESS TO COOLING.

Impact: Rising temperatures and inadequate cooling infrastructure could increase heat-related illnesses and deaths.

Recommendation: Develop a national cooling strategy focused on affordable cooling technologies, urban planning, and heat action plans.

“CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HEALTH EMERGENCY AS MUCH AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ONE.”
TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS

PUNJAB LAUNCHES ‘LAB ON WHEELS’ PROJECT TO PROMOTE DIGITAL AGRICULTURE.

Impact: Improves farmers access to soil testing and scientific advisory services, supporting higher agricultural productivity.

Recommendation: Expand mobile agricultural laboratories nationwide and integrate them with digital extension services.

“INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE IS ESSENTIAL TO FEEDING THE FUTURE SUSTAINABLY.”
NORMAN BORLAUG

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REFINERY UPGRADE POLICY APPROVED AFTER SIX-YEAR DEADLOCK.

Impact: Expected to modernise Pakistan’s refining sector, improve fuel quality, and reduce dependence on imported petroleum products.

Recommendation: Ensure timely implementation of refinery upgrades through transparent monitoring and stable investment policies.

“ENERGY TRANSITIONS REQUIRE LONG-TERM POLICY CERTAINTY AND SUSTAINED INVESTMENT.”
FATIH BIROL

PAKISTAN AND WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY COOPERATION.

Impact: Enhanced collaboration can improve resilience against food insecurity and support vulnerable communities.

Recommendation: Integrate food assistance with climate-resilient agriculture and nutrition-focused social protection programmes.

“FOOD SECURITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT FOOD; IT IS ABOUT PEACE, STABILITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY.”
DAVID BEASLEY

GREEN RAILWAY CORRIDOR PROJECT LAUNCHED TO CONVERT RAILWAY LAND INTO PARKS.

Impact: Expands urban green spaces, improves environmental quality, and enhances community wellbeing.

Recommendation: Integrate urban greening initiatives with long-term biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation strategies.

“GREEN SPACES ARE NOT A LUXURY BUT A NECESSITY FOR RESILIENT CITIES.”
JAN GEHL

PAKISTAN DIVERSIFIES CRUDE OIL IMPORTS AMID HORMUZ CLOSURE RISKS.

Impact: Weaker passport mobility limits international travel opportunities and reflects broader governance and diplomatic challenges.

Recommendation: Strengthen international cooperation, improve document security, and pursue agreements that enhance global mobility.

“INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OPENS DOORS THAT ISOLATION CANNOT.”
KOFI ANNAN

PAKISTAN’S FIRST GENDER-RESPONSIVE AI SCHOOL LAUNCHED.

Impact: Advances inclusive AI capacity-building and positions Pakistan as a regional leader in ethical digital transformation.

Recommendation: Expand gender-responsive AI education, strengthen digital skills, and promote women’s participation in emerging technologies.

“ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MUST BENEFIT EVERYONE, INCLUDING WOMEN AND GIRLS.” — AUDREY AZOULAY



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