

Country Analysis Report

Mental Health Day Edition

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Only for Members

Executive Summary

This report offers a concise analysis of Pakistan's significant challenges in mental health, governance, agriculture, and economic stability. It highlights that over 34% of the population faces mental health issues, worsened by societal stigma and inadequate access to care, particularly in rural areas. This situation necessitates reforms, including enhanced training for mental health professionals and community awareness initiatives.

In the political sphere, discussions between leaders Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Nawaz Sharif focus on economic concerns amid declining inflation and increased remittances. However, their historical undermining of democratic principles raises doubts about their commitment to meaningful reform addressing corruption and governance failures.

The proposed judicial reforms in the 26th constitutional amendment seek to change the Chief Justice appointment process, but concerns remain regarding increased political influence and the lack of performance evaluations for judges. Additionally, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's push for Imran Khan's communication with family and lawyers highlights broader struggles for accountability and civil liberties.

In agriculture, Pakistan faces risks to its competitive edge in premium Basmati rice production, losing market share to India due to outdated practices and insufficient government support. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has provided a \$7 billion bailout amid severe economic challenges, accompanied by high borrowing costs and austerity measures affecting lower-income populations. With total debt surpassing Rs 70 trillion, fiscal sustainability remains a pressing concern.

Water scarcity threatens agricultural growth, and a proposed 40% tax increase further strains citizens' purchasing power, raising the risk of civil unrest. The upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Islamabad presents an opportunity for improved diplomatic relations, particularly with India, but internal instability complicates these efforts. Additionally, Pakistan's request to the United Nations regarding alleged nuclear material theft in India underscores regional security concerns.

The ongoing crisis of out-of-school children, affecting 25.3 million children, highlights the urgent need for strategic interventions. Environmental initiatives like the Living Indus Initiative aim to restore vital natural resources but require better governance.

In summary, while there are positive developments across sectors, substantial challenges persist in mental health, governance, agriculture, and economic stability. The report calls for systemic reforms to promote a sustainable and equitable future for Pakistan, stressing the urgency of addressing these interconnected issues.



Mental Health in Pakistan

Mental health in Pakistan is a complex issue shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and systemic factors. Despite a significant burden of mental health disorders—estimated to affect over [34% of the population](#)—societal stigma remains a major barrier to treatment. Many people perceive mental illness through a lens of shame and misunderstanding, often equating it with weakness or moral failing. This stigma not only deters individuals from seeking help but also marginalizes those who do, leaving them vulnerable to further discrimination and isolation. The consequences are profound: untreated mental health issues contribute to social dysfunction, increased poverty, and reduced productivity, creating a cycle that perpetuates the problem.

The structural deficiencies in Pakistan's mental health care system exacerbate these issues. While the Mental Health Ordinance of 2001 was a significant step towards recognizing mental health rights, its implementation has been fraught with challenges. There is a critical shortage of mental health professionals—Pakistan has less than [0.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, compared to a global average of 9.7](#). Furthermore, mental health services are largely concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural populations with minimal access. This urban-rural divide reflects broader health inequities in the country, where social determinants like poverty, education, and gender disproportionately affect access to care. The lack of trained personnel, coupled with inadequate funding and resources, means that many individuals are left without the help they need.

Addressing these multifaceted problems requires a holistic approach. First, there needs to be a significant investment in training and recruiting mental health professionals. This includes not only psychiatrists but also psychologists, social workers, and community health workers who can deliver care at the grassroots level. Integrating mental health services into primary healthcare can facilitate early diagnosis and treatment, helping to destigmatize mental health issues. Training primary care providers to recognize and manage mental health conditions can bridge the gap between patients and specialized services.

Moreover, community-based initiatives are essential for changing societal perceptions. Awareness campaigns that educate the public about mental health, dispel myths, and promote the idea that mental health is integral to overall well-being can foster a more supportive environment. Leveraging traditional and local community structures, such as mosques and community centers, can enhance outreach efforts. Additionally, incorporating mental health education into school curricula can help to reshape attitudes from a young age, creating a generational shift in perception.

Finally, fostering collaboration between government, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies can mobilize resources and expertise. This [collaborative approach](#) can lead to the development of culturally relevant mental health programs, addressing local needs and barriers to care. Policymakers must prioritize mental health in national health strategies, ensuring that it receives adequate funding and attention alongside physical health.



Political Updates

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Nawaz Sharif Meet to Address Pakistan's Challenges Amid Economic Optimism:

In a noteworthy yet cautiously optimistic political development, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), [convened with Nawaz Sharif](#), the former Prime Minister and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), to deliberate on the myriad challenges currently confronting Pakistan. Meeting at Punjab House in Islamabad, the two leaders expressed contentment over recent economic trends, including a significant reduction in inflation from 32% to 6.9% and an impressive \$8.8 billion remittance influx from overseas Pakistanis.

Their dialogue also encompassed the prospective economic benefits stemming from a Saudi investor delegation and the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

However, despite the veneer of economic progress, it is imperative to recognize that these discussions occur against a backdrop of deep-rooted structural issues and political instability that continue to plague the nation.



Source: ARY News

A closer look of this meeting reveals underlying contradictions in the leaders' rhetoric.

While they championed the 2006 Charter of Democracy (CoD) as a stabilizing force for democracy, both parties have a history of undermining democratic principles for political expediency.

Nawaz Sharif's call for a justice system that values institutional integrity over individual power is commendable; however, it raises questions about his own past actions, which have often concentrated power within elite circles. Bilawal Bhutto's praise for Nawaz's leadership echoes a willingness to collaborate, yet it risks obscuring the contentious political legacy of both parties, which includes allegations of corruption and governance failures that have contributed to the country's economic malaise.

The optimism expressed by these leaders appears overly simplistic in light of Pakistan's complex socio-political landscape, where entrenched patronage systems and a lack of genuine accountability continue to hinder progress.

If genuine political unity and reform are to materialize, it will require more than just symbolic meetings; it will necessitate a concerted effort to address the fundamental issues that have historically divided them, fostering a more inclusive and transparent political culture capable of delivering real change for the Pakistani populace.



Source: The Express Tribune



Judicial Reforms and Balancing Justice:

The proposed [26th constitutional amendment](#) marks a pivotal moment in Pakistan's judicial framework, yet it raises critical questions about the effectiveness of these changes in genuinely reforming the judicial system.

While the amendment introduces an eight-member parliamentary committee to appoint the Chief Justice from three senior judges, one must consider whether this approach genuinely democratizes the process or simply shifts the locus of power without addressing underlying issues of political influence and accountability.

By removing the automatic ascension of the senior-most judge to the Chief Justice position, the amendment attempts to dilute entrenched hierarchies; however, it risks creating a system where political patronage might overshadow judicial meritocracy, potentially undermining the very independence the reform seeks to achieve.



Source: Tribune

Moreover, the [establishment of a seven-member constitutional commission](#) for judicial appointments introduces an ostensibly collaborative decision-making process.

Yet, the composition of this commission, which includes political representatives from both government and opposition, raises concerns about the politicization of the judiciary.

This could lead to a situation where judicial appointments are heavily influenced by political allegiances rather than qualifications and integrity.

The lack of clear guidelines regarding the commission's decision-making processes further exacerbates this concern, suggesting that the reforms may be more about political appeasement than about instilling genuine accountability and transparency within the judiciary.

Additionally, while the introduction of performance evaluations for High Court judges aims to enhance accountability, the real challenge lies in how these assessments will be implemented and who will oversee them. The provision for improvement opportunities before referral to the Supreme Judicial Council seems well-intentioned, but it lacks specifics on the criteria for performance evaluation and the repercussions of poor performance.

Without a robust framework for these evaluations, this mechanism could devolve into a toothless measure, further eroding public trust in the judicial system. In light of these concerns, the proposed amendments may not herald a new era of judicial independence and integrity but rather perpetuate existing power dynamics under a veneer of reform. For Pakistan's judiciary to reclaim its legitimacy, more profound systemic changes are required, beyond mere structural adjustments.

PTI's Push for Communication with Imran Khan:

The [recent developments](#) between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the ruling coalition, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), highlight a crucial moment in Pakistan's political landscape.

PTI's insistence on holding a protest on October 15, contingent upon the government allowing a meeting between party founder Imran Khan and his family and lawyers, underscores the party's commitment to advocating for its leader's rights and well-being. [PTI spokesperson](#) Sheikh Waqas Akram's characterization of Khan's confinement as a form of "incommunicado" treatment raises



critical concerns about the state's respect for democratic principles and civil liberties. The party's demands reflect a broader struggle for transparency and accountability within the political system, resonating with supporters who view Khan as a symbol of resistance against government repression.

On the other hand, the PML-N's dismissive stance towards the PTI's planned protests reveals a reluctance to engage with the legitimate concerns raised by the opposition. Talal Chaudhry's remarks regarding Khan's status as a "privileged prisoner" attempt to undermine PTI's narrative but may instead backfire by exposing the ruling party's defensive posture in the face of growing dissent.

By framing the upcoming SCO summit as a pretext for agitation, the PML-N diverts attention from the core issue of Khan's treatment and the broader implications of political dissent in a democratic society. The government's insistence on preventing any disruption during such an important international event suggests a prioritization of optics over genuine dialogue,

raising questions about its commitment to democratic norms. In this context, PTI's call for protests can be seen not merely as an act of defiance but as a vital assertion of democratic rights and civil liberties. The party's focus on Khan's well-being and access to legal counsel resonates deeply with the public, highlighting a sentiment that transcends party lines. As PTI mobilizes its supporters, the situation reflects a broader demand for accountability from the government and reinforces the party's position as a champion of the people's rights. This unfolding drama, therefore, not only underscores PTI's resilience but also emphasizes the necessity for a political environment



Source: Pakistan Today

Economic Outlook

Silent Harvest the Decline of Pakistan's Basmati Rice:

Pakistan's competitive advantage in premium Basmati rice is at risk, despite its long-standing reputation for producing some of the world's finest rice. Basmati, known for its distinctive aroma, elongated grains, and unmatched cooking qualities, has deep cultural and historical roots in Pakistan and India, dating back to the Mughal era.

Yet, while Pakistan's Basmati continues to be celebrated for its superior quality, the country has struggled to maintain its dominance in global markets.

Over the [past few decades](#), India has overtaken Pakistan through a combination of aggressive marketing, export-friendly policies, and large-scale production, outpacing Pakistan in both Basmati and non-Basmati rice exports.

India's recent export restrictions may have temporarily increased Pakistan's Basmati shipments, but this short-term boost masks deeper structural problems within Pakistan's rice sector.



One key issue is the lack of modernization in Pakistan's rice production and export infrastructure. While Basmati rice is still widely cultivated, the sector has not benefited from the technological and logistical improvements that have propelled India to the forefront of global rice exports. Pakistan's farmers and millers, particularly small-scale ones, often face outdated farming practices, inadequate access to modern equipment, and limited governmental support.

Moreover, Pakistan's marketing efforts have lagged behind India's, with little done to build brand recognition or capitalize on the premium value of Basmati rice in international markets. The complacency of key stakeholders—farmers, millers, and the government—has allowed India to seize market share, despite Pakistan's superior product.

If these trends continue, Pakistan risks losing its competitive edge entirely. While Pakistan has historically benefited from strong domestic demand and periodic export boosts due to external factors like India's recent clampdown, relying on such factors is unsustainable.

To regain its position, Pakistan must invest in upgrading its agricultural sector, support its farmers with better technology and resources, and pursue a more proactive export strategy that highlights the unique qualities of Pakistani Basmati. Failure to act could result in the erosion of one of Pakistan's most valuable agricultural exports, leaving the field wide open for India to dominate the Basmati rice market in the long run.

Post-Harvest Losses Cost Pakistan Rs496 Billion in Key Crops:

Pakistan faced significant agricultural losses last year due to improper post-harvest handling of five major crops, leading to an [economic hit of Rs496.39 billion](#). According to data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, wheat suffered a 9% loss, while rice, corn, and hot pepper green

witnessed 15% each, and potato the highest at 19%. This resulted in wheat losses amounting to Rs158.12 billion, rice at Rs79.75 billion, corn at Rs115.5 billion, potato at Rs142.27 billion, and hot pepper green at Rs0.75 billion.

CropLife's Biotech and Seed Committee member Sajid Mahmood, in a workshop organized by CropLife Pakistan, highlighted that 2.53 million metric tons of wheat and 1.1 million metric tons of rice were lost last year due to inadequate post-harvest measures.

The event also stressed the urgent need for improved harvesting techniques, storage facilities, and transportation systems, calling on the government to invest in better infrastructure and credit access for growers.

The magnitude of Pakistan's post-harvest losses underscores a critical flaw in its agricultural framework, where inefficiencies in storage, transportation, and infrastructure significantly undermine national food security.

With wheat and rice being staple crops, the staggering loss of 2.53 million metric tons of wheat is alarming, especially in a country grappling with rising food insecurity. Comparing these figures to developed nations like the United States, where post-harvest losses range from 1-2% for cereals, reveals Pakistan's dire need for modernization in its agricultural practices. While the workshop emphasized solutions such as regenerative agriculture and climate-resilient crops, the core issue remains a lack of investment in basic agricultural infrastructure and R&D.

The government's inaction on these fronts exacerbates the problem, leaving Pakistan's growers vulnerable and threatening the nation's overall food security.

Without urgent reforms, including better regulatory support for seed technology and access to credit, the cycle of waste and economic loss is likely to persist.



IMF's Policies: A Deepening Crisis for Pakistan's Economy:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), created as a global financial safety net for countries in economic distress, has once again come under scrutiny, this time for its handling of Pakistan's economic woes. After a prolonged delay, Pakistan has secured an IMF loan to cover a [\\$2 billion financing gap](#), after the country reached a broader \$7 billion agreement with the IMF in July but not before being forced into high-cost commercial borrowing at a record interest rate of 11%.

With the country needing over \$13 billion more in foreign currency loans in FY25, this arrangement sets an alarming precedent for further unsustainable borrowing. Meanwhile, the IMF has charged Pakistan over \$750 million in interest and fees since 2022 alone, further straining its already fragile economy. The loan terms, combined with the IMF's heavy emphasis on fiscal austerity and questionable debt sustainability assessments, have cast a long shadow on Pakistan's economic future.

Critically, the IMF's approach to Pakistan's debt distress highlights the long-standing flaws in its lending practices. The Fund has often prioritized the geopolitical and financial interests of its largest shareholders over the well-being of the countries it purports to assist.

Pakistan's programme is emblematic of this failure, with its focus on austerity measures that disproportionately affect the lower and middle-income population while doing little to address the country's structural economic problems, such as a weak export sector.

The IMF's lending strategy appears short-sighted, deferring necessary reforms and pushing the country into a vicious cycle of borrowing. This not only undermines Pakistan's economic sovereignty but also perpetuates the very crises the IMF is meant to resolve.

Pakistan's Water Crisis: A Looming Threat to Agricultural Growth:

Water scarcity has become a critical bottleneck for Pakistan's agricultural sector, affecting its ability to expand cultivated land despite having vast tracts of barren land available, particularly in Balochistan and Punjab. The country faces several challenges, including declining water resources, outdated irrigation practices, and a lack of water-use efficiency at the farm level.

Pakistan's two largest water sources—glaciers and underground reserves—are depleting rapidly, with climate change exacerbating the problem by accelerating glacier melt and increasing temperatures.

The country's storage capacity has dwindled from [16.26 million acre-feet \(MAF\) to 13.68 MAF](#), leaving Pakistan with only 30 days of water reserves, far behind its regional peers like India, which boasts 170 days. This situation has forced Pakistan to increasingly rely on groundwater, making it the third-largest user of groundwater globally, a practice that is unsustainable as the extraction rates exceed natural replenishment.



Source: DAWN

Critically, Pakistan's approach to water management and agriculture is severely outdated. The flood irrigation method, commonly used in rice, sugarcane, and maize cultivation, is wasteful and inefficient, contributing to significant water loss through evaporation. Despite various megaprojects aimed at reducing water losses through canal lining, Pakistan's farm-level water-use efficiency remains abysmally low.



Comparisons show that Pakistan generates only \$0.40 per cubic meter of water used in agriculture, far behind China's \$2.51 and even Bangladesh's \$0.98. The inefficiency is compounded by electricity costs for tube wells, leading many farmers to switch to solar-powered alternatives, though these are unreliable due to weather conditions. The growing water crisis, coupled with outdated irrigation practices, presents a clear imperative: Pakistan must adopt modern water-efficient irrigation systems like drip and sprinkler irrigation to safeguard its agricultural future. Without urgent action, the economic viability of Pakistan's agriculture sector will be further jeopardized, threatening both food security and rural livelihoods.

IMF Bailout: A Financial Lifeline for Pakistan, But Not for Its Citizens?

Pakistan's recent agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$7 billion bailout has drawn significant attention as the nation grapples with severe economic challenges. The deal follows a series of crises marked by soaring inflation, dwindling foreign reserves, and rising costs of essential goods. The conditions of the bailout mandate an unprecedented **40% increase in taxes**, leading to widespread panic among the population. Citizens report spending over half their income on basic necessities, with the prices of everyday items skyrocketing. For instance, electricity prices have tripled, and basic food items like milk have become more expensive than in major global cities. This economic strain is exacerbated by stagnant wages, which have failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living, causing a significant decline in purchasing power.



Source: MG Link News

Analyzing the implications of these developments reveals a deepening socioeconomic divide in Pakistan. The government's insistence on tax hikes without corresponding cuts in state expenditures reflects a troubling trend where the burden of economic reforms falls disproportionately on the middle and lower classes.

As public frustration mounts, there is a growing risk of civil unrest, reminiscent of the protests in other countries facing similar austerity measures. The potential backlash from the populace, who feel neglected by a political elite that has historically benefited at their expense, poses a serious threat to the stability of the current government. Without addressing the underlying issues of economic inequality and implementing meaningful reforms, Pakistan risks entering a cycle of protests and further economic decline, undermining any progress made through international financial assistance.

Pakistan's Debt Soars Past Rs 70 Trillion:

Pakistan's federal government has seen its total debt stocks surpass the alarming threshold of **Rs 70 trillion** by the end of August 2024, primarily due to significant borrowing to address a growing fiscal deficit. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported a 2.1% increase in the central government's debt during the first two months of the fiscal year (FY25), with the total debt reaching Rs 70.362 trillion, marking an increase of Rs 1.448 trillion since June 2024.

A substantial portion of this increase can be attributed to domestic borrowing, which rose to Rs 48.34 trillion, while external debt also saw a modest rise to Rs 22.023 trillion, reflecting ongoing economic pressures. An analysis by Topline Securities indicates a reduction in the Central Bank Government Debt to GDP ratio, which fell to 65% in August 2024 from 73% a year earlier.

This decrease is largely driven by a decline in the external debt to GDP ratio, which dropped from 27.6% to 20.2% during the same period.



The improvement is attributed to the appreciation of the Pakistani Rupee against the US dollar, which has seen the exchange rate shift from PKR 305.61 in August 2023 to PKR 278.57 in August 2024.

While these figures suggest some positive developments in terms of GDP ratios, the substantial increase in overall debt levels raises concerns about the government's long-term fiscal sustainability and its capacity to manage rising financial obligations.

Pakistan's Tax Shift and Energy Debt Strategy:

In a significant shift in fiscal policy, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb announced that a [tax on the agriculture sector](#) will be implemented starting July 1, 2025, as part of the National Fiscal Pact (NFP) with provinces. This move marks an important step towards broadening the tax base in a sector that has traditionally been exempt from such obligations.

By promising uniform legislation by January, the government is not only aiming to enhance revenue but also to ensure that the agricultural income is subject to similar regulations as other sectors.

However, the real challenge lies in the execution of these reforms, given the historical resistance from influential agricultural lobbies. Moreover, as the government prepares for a crackdown on non-filers, the efficiency of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in leveraging data analytics to identify tax evaders will be crucial.

The finance minister's commitment to pursuing "tax thieves" indicates a shift towards a more stringent tax enforcement regime, but the government's ability to effectively manage this crackdown while maintaining public support remains to be seen. Additionally, the ongoing negotiations with China regarding the reprofiling of energy sector debt underscore the complexities of Pakistan's financial landscape.

The government's focus on restructuring its energy debt, primarily due to unsustainable capacity payments that have contributed to circular debt, reflects a pressing need for long-term financial strategies.

As the minister indicated, talks with Chinese financial institutions are crucial for establishing revised repayment terms, which will alleviate immediate fiscal pressures. The anticipated MoU with China is a strategic move, but it also raises questions about Pakistan's dependency on external financing.

Furthermore, the Asian Development Bank's commitment of \$8.4 billion over the next four years signals a critical influx of funds, yet the government must ensure that these resources are utilized effectively to foster sustainable development.

As policymakers navigate these financial reforms and debt negotiations, they must balance immediate fiscal needs with long-term economic stability to steer Pakistan toward a more resilient financial future.



Source: DAWN



Diplomatic Landscape

A Pivotal Moment for Pakistan-India Relations at the SCO Summit:

Hosting the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) Summit in Islamabad represents a significant milestone for Pakistan, bringing together leaders from key Eurasian nations, including China, Russia, and now, for the first time in nearly a decade, India.

The evolution of the SCO, from its origins as the Shanghai Five to its current status as a pivotal international forum, underscores the importance of regional cooperation and dialogue. The participation of Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar marks a crucial development in bilateral relations, suggesting a potential thaw in tensions that have long strained interactions between the two nations.

Media discussions surrounding this visit reflect a cautious optimism about the future of Pakistan-India relations, highlighting the symbolic importance of such high-level exchanges in promoting peace and stability in a region fraught with complexities.

However, while the SCO Summit presents an opportunity for dialogue, Pakistan must navigate a complex landscape of internal challenges, including rising militancy and political instability. The backdrop of these issues complicates the prospect of meaningful engagement with India.

As both nations share a rich history intertwined with numerous conflicts, the need for constructive dialogue has never been more urgent. The current political climate in India, particularly following recent elections, may offer a window for Pakistan to seek a diplomatic rapprochement. To capitalize on this moment, it is essential for Pakistan to adopt a strategic approach focused on dialogue and collaboration, emphasizing shared interests and common

challenges. The eyes of millions across both nations remain fixed on the outcomes of this summit, underscoring the critical role that international diplomacy can play in fostering peace and stability in South Asia.



Source: The News

Pakistan Calls for UN Investigation into Nuclear Material Theft in India:

Pakistan has urged the [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) to thoroughly investigate a series of thefts involving nuclear materials in India, highlighting concerns over the security of radioactive substances.

Ambassador Munir Akram, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN, cited a recent incident in Bihar, where local authorities arrested three smugglers in possession of Californium, a rare and highly radioactive element that commands significant value on the black market, reportedly worth \$100 million. Akram noted that this was not an isolated case, referencing multiple incidents in 2021 and suggesting the existence of a burgeoning black market for sensitive materials in India. He emphasized that the UNSC should be alarmed by these repeated occurrences, asserting that they undermine regional stability and could potentially facilitate the acquisition of nuclear materials by non-state actors.



This development brings to the forefront the broader implications of nuclear material security in South Asia, where both India and Pakistan possess nuclear arsenals. While Pakistan asserts its commitment to maintaining a robust regulatory framework for the transfer of sensitive goods, Akram's remarks indicate a growing concern regarding India's ability to manage its nuclear resources effectively.

The recurring thefts raise questions about the adequacy of India's safeguards and the potential risks associated with the proliferation of radioactive materials. Furthermore, Pakistan's call for international scrutiny suggests a strategic maneuver to highlight its own adherence to UNSC resolution 1540 while casting doubt on India's nuclear governance.

The geopolitical dynamics of the region are further complicated by this issue, as both nations continue to navigate historical tensions and competing narratives surrounding their respective nuclear capabilities.

This situation underscores the urgent need for enhanced regional cooperation and stringent measures to prevent the illicit trade of nuclear materials, which poses a significant threat not only to South Asia but to global security at large.

Pakistan to Finalize \$2 Billion Agreements with Saudi Arabia:

During a recent federal cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that Pakistan is poised to sign agreements and memorandums of understanding worth \$2 billion with Saudi Arabia. [The Saudi delegation](#), led by Minister for Investment Khalid Bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih, is visiting Islamabad from October 9 to 11.

This visit aims to strengthen economic ties between the two nations and follows a series of supportive measures from countries like China and the UAE, which helped secure an IMF loan facility for Pakistan.

Sharif highlighted his government's efforts to reform the economy, citing a reduction in inflation from 32% to 6.9%, an increase in tax return filers, and a recent relief package for power consumers.

Additionally, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb expressed optimism regarding macroeconomic stability, including currency stability and a decrease in the policy rate, further asserting that Pakistan's economic outlook is improving. While the agreements with Saudi Arabia signal a potential boost for Pakistan's economy, they also highlight the complexities of the nation's financial challenges. The recent agreements come on the heels of a substantial IMF bailout, which has sparked widespread unrest among citizens due to increased taxes and soaring prices of essentials.

The government's narrative of economic recovery contrasts sharply with the reality faced by the average Pakistani, whose purchasing power continues to decline amidst rising inflation. Despite claims of macroeconomic stability, the measures taken seem more geared toward satisfying international creditors than addressing the immediate needs of the population.

As inflation continues to burden the middle and lower classes, the government's reliance on foreign partnerships raises concerns about its ability to enact meaningful reforms that genuinely benefit its citizens. The dichotomy between government optimism and public distress may lead to increased social tensions, challenging the sustainability of these economic measures and the stability of the current administration.

Russia and Pakistan Sign Barter Deals Amid Payment Challenges:

In a bid to overcome payment barriers exacerbated by Western sanctions, agricultural companies from [Russia and Pakistan have entered into barter agreements](#) to facilitate trade.



According to Russia's TASS news agency, Russian firm Astarta-Agrotrading will supply 20,000 tonnes of chickpeas in exchange for 20,000 tonnes of rice from Pakistan's Meskay & Femtee Trading Company. A separate deal will see 15,000 tonnes of chickpeas and 10,000 tonnes of lentils traded for 15,000 tonnes of mandarins and 10,000 tonnes of potatoes. This barter mechanism circumvents the difficulties both nations face with international payments, particularly in light of sanctions imposed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. Such deals also reduce the risk of currency volatility and provide a more discreet method of trade, away from the watchful eye of Western powers.

Barter as a Strategic Response to Sanctions and Economic Isolation?

These barter deals between Russia and Pakistan represent a strategic shift in global trade dynamics, particularly for nations facing economic sanctions.

For Russia, struggling with severe financial isolation due to its invasion of Ukraine, barter agreements serve as an alternative to traditional payment systems that have become increasingly difficult to navigate.

By bypassing international monetary exchanges, both countries are mitigating the risks associated with currency fluctuations and the pressure of global sanctions. While barter trades offer short-term relief and enable continued trade in essential agricultural commodities, they also reflect the broader geopolitical shifts where sanctioned nations are forging closer ties outside the conventional trade networks dominated by Western powers. However, the reliance on such mechanisms could limit economic growth and create inefficiencies, as barter lacks the flexibility and liquidity of standard monetary transactions. These deals, though pragmatic in the current climate, may not be sustainable long-term solutions, especially if global tensions continue to escalate.

Security and Governance

Clashes and Councils: The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement:

The [Pashtun Tahafuz Movement \(PTM\)](#), founded in 2014, has emerged as a critical voice advocating against the extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances affecting Pashtuns and other ethnic minorities in Pakistan. Following the federal government's recent ban on the PTM, tensions have escalated, culminating in violent clashes between police and PTM supporters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, resulting in at least three fatalities. The government's stance characterizes the PTM as a supporter of the Pakistani Taliban, a claim the movement vehemently denies. Despite the ban, the PTM has announced its intention to hold the Pashtun National Jirga on October 11, emphasizing its commitment to discussing peace and security issues impacting the Pashtun community.

In a surprising turn, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government has allowed the PTM to convene a grand council of political and tribal elders despite the ban.

KP Public Health Minister Pakhtoon Yar Khan highlighted the importance of resolving issues through dialogue while reiterating the provincial government's stance against violence. The backdrop of the PTM's planned gathering is marked by the assertion from its leadership that the recent weeks have been a test of their determination in the face of government repression.

Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have criticized the ban, calling it



an arbitrary measure that reflects broader systemic issues within the Pakistani state, including the unlawful use of force and suppression of dissent. As the PTM prepares for its assembly, the situation remains charged, raising critical questions about the future of Pashtun rights activism and the government's approach to ethnic minority grievances in Pakistan.

Deadly Attack on Miners Highlights Balochistan's Ongoing Security Crisis:

The recent attack that claimed the lives of [20 coal miners](#) in Balochistan has raised alarm bells about the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan's southwestern region, particularly as the country prepares for an important international summit in Islamabad. Armed assailants stormed the miners' quarters in the Dukki district, utilizing heavy weaponry such as rockets and grenades in an act that underscores the increasing boldness of militant groups operating in the area. The fact that most victims were Pashtun-speaking locals, along with Afghan nationals among the casualties, reflects the complex ethnic dynamics at play and the pervasive sense of vulnerability faced by laborers in this economically vital yet perilous region.

Such violence not only poses a grave humanitarian concern but also threatens the stability necessary for economic activities, including the extraction of Balochistan's rich mineral resources.

The attack has also brought to light the [ongoing struggle](#) between local nationalist movements and the central government, particularly the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which accuses Islamabad of exploiting the province's resources while neglecting its residents. As violence escalates in a region already fraught with discontent, the implications for security, investment, and international relations are significant.

The upcoming summit will likely be overshadowed by fears of further instability, potentially deterring foreign investment and cooperation. Moreover, without a comprehensive strategy to address both the security concerns and the socio-economic grievances of Balochistan's residents, the government may find itself grappling with an even deeper crisis that undermines its broader development goals and national unity.

Restrictions on Human Rights Activist Highlight Ongoing Struggles for Baloch Rights:

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has voiced serious concerns over the alleged travel restrictions imposed on [Dr. Mahrang Baloch](#), a prominent advocate for Baloch rights and a recent addition to Time magazine's '[2024 Time100 Next](#)' list. Dr. Mahrang claims she was barred from boarding a flight to the United States for an event celebrating her achievements, allegedly on orders from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport.

Despite not being placed on the Exit Control List, she reportedly had her passport and mobile phone confiscated, raising questions about the transparency of such actions and the state's commitment to upholding human rights. This incident underscores the persistent challenges faced by activists in Pakistan, particularly those addressing sensitive issues like enforced disappearances and regional injustices.

In her statement, Dr. Mahrang highlighted the distressing experience of being harassed simply for advocating human rights, echoing the sentiment of numerous activists who have faced similar treatment. The HRCP and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor condemned the actions taken against her, emphasizing that restricting her freedom of movement constitutes a serious violation of her rights.



Dr. Mahrang's work, particularly in advocating for families affected by enforced disappearances in Balochistan, has gained international recognition, further illustrating the risks that human rights defenders face in Pakistan.

This situation not only reflects the ongoing struggle for Baloch rights but also raises broader concerns about the state's approach to dissent and activism, particularly as reports of missing persons continue to surface in the region.

Social and Humanitarian Focus

Study Reveals Tehsil-Level Gaps in Pakistan's Out-of-School Children Crisis:

A recent study by the Pakistan Alliance for Maths and Science has brought to light alarming disparities in school enrolment across Pakistan, with **25.3 million children** aged 5 to 16 currently out of school. Shockingly, over 25% of these children are concentrated in just 45 tehsils, revealing a significant geographic imbalance in the country's educational crisis.

The report, based on the 2023 census and titled *The Missing Third of Pakistan*, highlights tehsils like Kot Mandal in Sibi, where 91.62% of children do not attend school, and South Waziristan's Tol Khulla, which has a similar rate of 90.8%.

Meanwhile, tehsils such as Rawalpindi's Kahuta (7.66%) and Abbottabad's Mastut (1.46%) boast far lower numbers of out-of-school children, pointing to a stark contrast between regions. Education Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani emphasized the federal government's commitment to addressing the issue, noting that findings from the report would help set new targets for intervention.

The findings of this study expose the deep regional disparities that plague Pakistan's education system, particularly in remote and underdeveloped tehsils.

With over 25% of out-of-school children concentrated in just 45 tehsils, it is evident that systemic challenges such as lack of infrastructure, economic hardship, and cultural

barriers are preventing millions of children from accessing education. Tehsils like South Waziristan and Sibi, with over 90% of children out of school, reflect the most severe manifestations of this educational crisis.

However, the fact that regions like Rawalpindi and Abbottabad have consistently high enrolment rates highlights the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities.

While the government's plan to address these gaps through targeted interventions is promising, success will depend on a comprehensive approach that includes infrastructure development, community engagement, and financial support for families in marginalized regions.

Addressing these disparities is critical, as the future of Pakistan's literacy and workforce hinges on equitable access to education across all areas of the country.



Source: Unsplash



Environmental and Climate Perspectives

Strengthening Climate Resilience: Pakistan Secures Funding for Environmental Restoration:

Pakistan has secured a vital [USD 10 million grant](#) from the Adaptation Fund to finance the Sustainable Actions for Ecosystems Restoration in Pakistan (SAFER) project, a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). This initiative focuses on improving water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and youth. The project is part of Pakistan's broader attempt to strengthen its climate resilience, addressing the growing threats posed by climate change, which disproportionately impact the country's poorest and most at-risk communities.

While this funding is a positive step, it highlights Pakistan's deep dependence on external financial support for climate adaptation. The SAFER project, while addressing critical issues, reflects the reactive nature of the country's climate policies, which have often lagged behind the scale of the climate challenges it faces. With almost 90% of the population residing in the Indus Basin, Pakistan's vulnerability to shifting river flows and extreme weather events continues to escalate. The real test will lie in how effectively this project is implemented and integrated with national initiatives like the Living Indus Initiative. Without structural reforms and long-term planning, piecemeal efforts like SAFER may struggle to deliver sustainable solutions, leaving the country's most vulnerable communities at continued risk.

Flowing Towards Resilience: Why restoring the Indus is crucial for Pakistan's Future:

The Indus River, often called the lifeblood of Pakistan, has sustained civilizations for thousands of years. Today, it remains vital to the country's survival, providing water, food, and jobs to millions.

However, the river has become increasingly unpredictable as climate change accelerates, with devastating floods wreaking havoc on the Indus Basin. These disasters underscore Pakistan's vulnerability to the impacts of global warming, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive action.

[The Living Indus Initiative](#), launched by the Pakistani government, aims to restore the river's ecosystems and safeguard the livelihoods of millions. With recognition as a World Restoration Flagship, the initiative is seen as a hopeful step in a country where climate adaptation is no longer optional but necessary for survival.

Yet, as promising as the initiative is, it raises important questions about the sustainability of Pakistan's approach to climate resilience. The ambition to restore 25 million hectares by 2030,



Source: UNEP



while impressive on paper, faces significant obstacles, including Pakistan's chronic governance challenges and financial constraints. Although the project has already restored over a million hectares, there's a long road ahead, and without consistent political will, transparency, and international funding, it risks becoming another incomplete environmental effort.

Furthermore, while interventions like glacial grafting and flood emergency plans show ingenuity, they are ultimately reactive measures in a country still playing catch-up to climate disasters rather than leading with proactive, long-term strategies.

The Living Indus Initiative may also be underestimating the complexities of balancing ecosystem restoration with economic development in a densely populated country that heavily relies on the river for agriculture.

Protecting wetlands and promoting sustainable farming practices are essential, but they need to be aligned with policies that incentivize industries and local communities to prioritize environmental sustainability over short-term profits.

The key to the initiative's success will lie not just in restoring ecosystems, but in changing the relationship between Pakistan's economy and its natural resources, ensuring that the river and the people it supports can thrive together for generations to come.



Source: UNEP

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