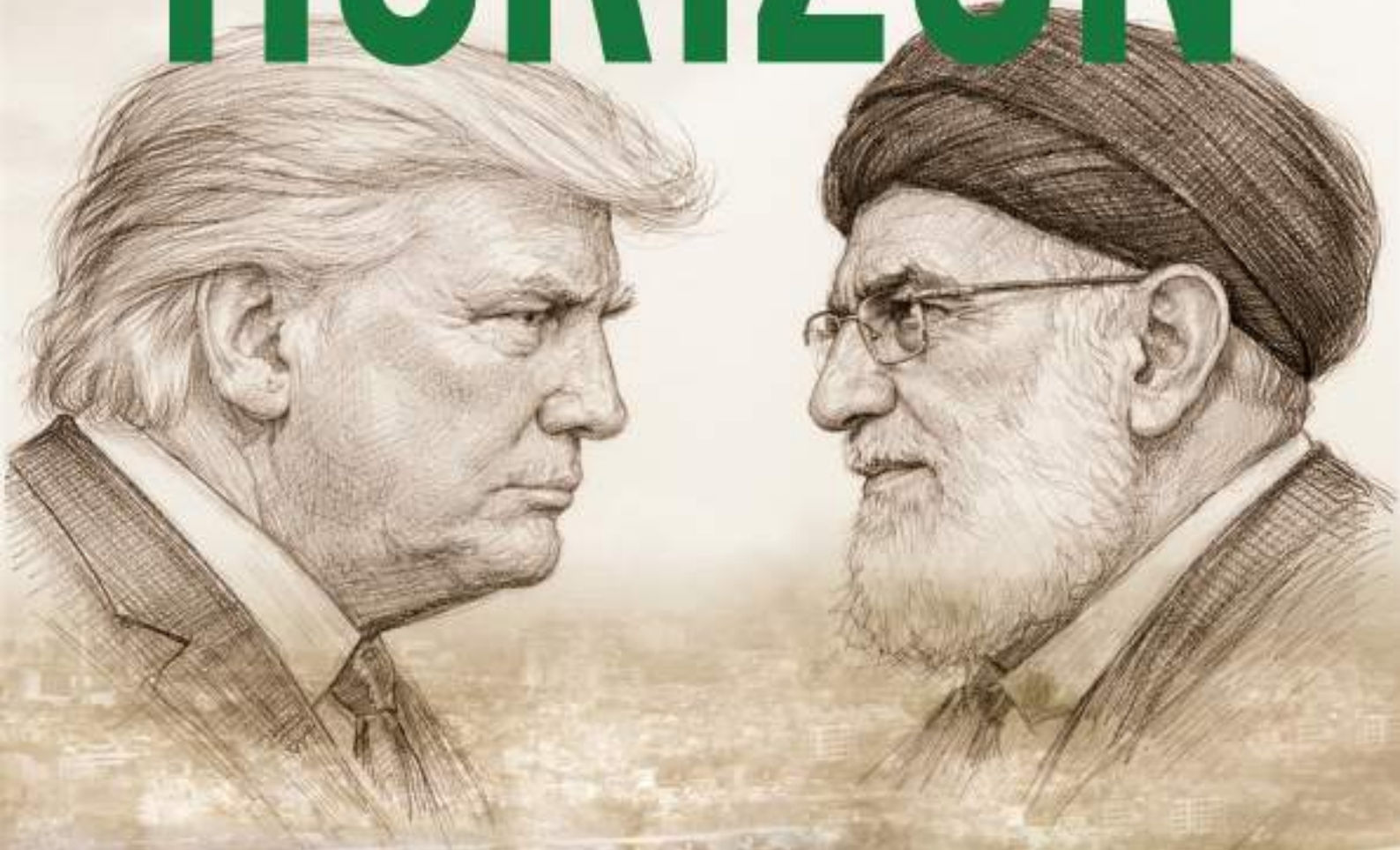


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# HORIZON



RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ

# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

The Middle East crossed a dangerous threshold when a US strike on a girls' elementary school in Minab, Iran, killed at least 168 students and, on the same day, a joint US–Israeli operation assassinated Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Together, these attacks marked a dramatic escalation that has pushed the region toward one of its most volatile crises in decades, with consequences that could reshape global strategic alignments.

A pivotal development has been the transition within Iran's leadership following the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The selection of Mojtaba Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader signals Tehran's determination to maintain continuity and internal stability in the face of external pressure. Iran's diplomatic outreach has also intensified. In recent contacts, Iran's president spoke with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin, emphasising cooperation amid the escalating confrontation.

For Pakistan, the crisis presents immediate strategic and economic concerns. The country shares a long border with Iran while relying heavily on Gulf energy routes. The security of the Strait of Hormuz — through which a significant share of global oil supplies passes — is therefore critical. As tensions mounted in the Gulf, Pakistan has taken precautionary measures, including escorting commercial vessels through the strait in order to safeguard maritime trade and energy supplies.

At the diplomatic level, Islamabad has supported international efforts to prevent further escalation. At the United Nations Security Council, Pakistan voted in favour of two resolutions addressing the crisis. One, sponsored by Bahrain, called for restraint, protection of civilians, and an immediate cessation of hostilities. The other, introduced by Russia, criticised the strikes on Iranian territory and urged respect for international law while calling for urgent diplomatic engagement to prevent a wider regional war. While only the Bahrain-sponsored resolution ultimately passed, Pakistan's support for both reflected its consistent position in favour of de-escalation and dialogue.

The unfolding confrontation is already reshaping the geopolitical environment of the region. With energy markets unsettled, alliances shifting, and major powers increasingly involved, the consequences are likely to extend well beyond the immediate theatre of conflict.

For Pakistan, the priority remains clear: maintain active diplomacy, safeguard economic lifelines, and support efforts aimed at preventing a wider war in a region whose stability is vital for global peace and prosperity.

Sincerely,  
Saira Bano  
Editor-in-Chief

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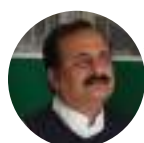
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# THE US-ISRAEL WAR ON IRAN PAKISTAN ON A STRATEGIC TIGHTROPE



**RANA MASHHOOD AHMAD KHAN**

The US–Israel war on Iran has rapidly transformed the strategic landscape of the Middle East, placing Pakistan in a delicate diplomatic position. As a neighbour of Iran, a long-standing security partner of Saudi Arabia, and a country deeply dependent on Gulf energy supplies, Islamabad has had to respond on multiple fronts — political, diplomatic, and economic — while ensuring that the widening conflict does not draw Pakistan directly into confrontation.

Pakistan’s leadership swiftly condemned the killing of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint US–Israel strike, describing it as a dangerous escalation with potentially destabilising consequences for the entire region.

Pakistan’s political leadership also expressed strong condemnation of the attack and condolences over the killing. While Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar visited the Iranian embassy in Islamabad to convey condolences, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif described the assassination as a dangerous escalation in a public address. Nawaz Sharif, president of the Pakistan Muslim League (N), also issued a message on social media condemning the attack and expressing sympathy with the Iranian people. Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari condemned what he described as aggression against Iran during his address to a joint session of Parliament, warning that such actions risked pushing the region toward wider instability.



“ **PAKISTAN'S GEOGRAPHIC AND DIPLOMATIC POSITION MAKES NEUTRALITY DIFFICULT YET ESSENTIAL.** ”

The reaction within Pakistan itself has been intense. Demonstrations in support of Iran erupted across several cities, reflecting strong public sentiment and highlighting the emotional resonance the conflict carries inside Pakistan. For the government, these developments add a domestic dimension to an already complex geopolitical challenge.

Pakistan's geographic and diplomatic position makes neutrality difficult yet essential. The country shares a long border with Iran in Balochistan while maintaining deep strategic and economic ties with Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, with which Pakistan has long-standing defence cooperation.

Pakistan moved quickly on the diplomatic front to ensure the widening conflict did not draw it directly into the confrontation. Addressing the Senate, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar revealed that Islamabad engaged in urgent back-channel communication with both Tehran and Riyadh after the assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Dar informed the Iranian leadership about Pakistan's Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Saudi Arabia while simultaneously conveying Tehran's request that Saudi territory should not be used for attacks against Iran.

“They asked for some assurances that Saudi soil should not be used,” Dar told lawmakers, adding, “I got them the assurances.” He said this shuttle diplomacy helped prevent direct Iranian retaliation against Saudi Arabia and Oman during the early phase of the conflict.

The expansion of the war theatre to Gulf countries hosting American bases has further complicated Islamabad's strategic calculations. Pakistan cannot afford a rupture with Iran, a neighbouring state with which it shares security concerns and economic potential, including long-discussed energy cooperation. At the same time, its economic lifelines — oil imports, remittances, and investment — are closely linked to the Gulf monarchies.

Balancing these relationships requires careful diplomacy. Islamabad's response so far has emphasised restraint, dialogue, and regional stability. The unfolding conflict also intersects with Pakistan's own security challenges. The country remains engaged in operations against militants belonging to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), many of whom operate from sanctuaries across the border in Afghanistan.

A wider regional war could complicate these counterterrorism efforts in several ways. First, geopolitical instability often provides space for militant groups to reorganise and expand. Second, Pakistan's security apparatus could face additional strain if the conflict leads to refugee flows, arms smuggling, or intelligence activity across neighbouring territories. The western borderlands, already fragile due to decades of conflict, could become more volatile if regional instability spills over.

While diplomacy and security considerations dominate Pakistan's strategic response, the crisis has also exposed the country's economic vulnerability

“ PAKISTAN MOVED QUICKLY TO ENSURE THE WIDENING CONFLICT DID NOT DRAW IT INTO THE CONFRONTATION. ”



to disruptions in Gulf energy supplies. With global oil flows disrupted and shipping routes across the region under pressure, the government has moved swiftly to implement emergency measures aimed at conserving fuel, stabilising supplies, and preparing for a potentially prolonged period of volatility.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government has announced a series of austerity and energy-conservation measures designed to reduce fuel consumption nationwide. Schools are scheduled to close for two weeks, universities are shifting to online classes, and government offices are operating on a reduced schedule with only half the staff physically present. The government has also cut departmental fuel allowances, restricted foreign travel for officials, and removed most official vehicles from the roads in order to curb consumption.

At the same time, Islamabad has announced one of the largest increases in petroleum prices in recent years, raising petrol and diesel prices by approximately Rs55 per litre as global oil markets react to the Gulf conflict.

These emergency measures underscore how deeply Pakistan's economy is tied to stability in the Gulf. The closure or disruption of the Strait of Hormuz presents a particularly severe risk. The narrow maritime passage carries a large portion of global oil shipments, including most of the crude imported by Pakistan from Gulf producers such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Even temporary disruption has sent freight rates, insurance costs, and crude prices sharply upward. To mitigate these risks, the government is exploring alternative routes for oil shipments through Red Sea

export terminals in Saudi Arabia and considering more frequent fuel price revisions to respond quickly to volatile global markets.

Yet even with such measures, Pakistan's economic exposure remains significant. Rising fuel costs inevitably translate into higher transport charges, electricity tariffs, and inflation, placing further strain on households and industry alike.

Beyond the region, the crisis is also reshaping global alignments. China and Russia have criticised the strike on Iran and called for restraint, while Western powers have justified the operation as part of broader security concerns.

For Pakistan, which maintains a strategic partnership with China, these emerging geopolitical dynamics are highly relevant. Islamabad's foreign policy is navigating an increasingly polarised international environment where major powers are positioning themselves around the conflict.

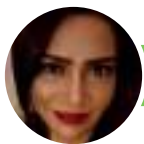
The Middle East war presents Pakistan with a complex and evolving challenge—economic, diplomatic, and security-related. Energy shocks threaten domestic stability, public sentiment demands solidarity with fellow Muslim nations, and strategic alliances pull Islamabad in different directions.

In such circumstances, Pakistan's strategy is guided by cautious diplomacy and pragmatic decision-making. As the conflict continues to evolve, Islamabad is seeking to protect national interests, maintain regional balance, and avoid entanglement in a widening war ■

*The writer is the chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme.*



# A YEAR OF PUNJAB'S DEVELOPMENT MOMENTUM



SAIRA BANO

Over the past year, Punjab has entered what many observers describe as a new phase of governance — one in which policy commitments are increasingly translating into visible change on the ground. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the provincial government has pursued a wide-ranging development agenda focused on infrastructure, human capital, social welfare, public health, and institutional reform.

While many initiatives were announced early in the government's tenure, the past year has seen several of these projects begin to materialise. New public transport systems are appearing on city roads, social protection programmes are reaching vulnerable households, specialised healthcare facilities are being developed, and large-scale skills development initiatives are preparing young people for emerging industries.

Taken together, these efforts reflect a strategy built around two parallel objectives: strengthening essential public services while investing in long-term economic capacity.

## INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL

Punjab's development strategy places strong emphasis on human development — particularly education, skills training, and youth employment.

One of the most ambitious initiatives in this area has been the Chief Minister's Skills Development Programme, designed to equip thousands of young Pakistanis with modern technical skills. Punjab has established a new Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Department to train students in high-demand fields such as construction, manufacturing,

automotive, energy, information technology, hospitality, and personal services.

The initiative is intended not only to expand employment opportunities within Pakistan but also to prepare youth for participation in the global digital economy. Graduates receive internationally recognised certifications from leading technology companies, significantly improving their prospects in both domestic and overseas job markets.

A notable addition to Punjab's education landscape has been the establishment of Autism Schools and Centres of Excellence. These institutions provide specialised education and early intervention for children on the autism spectrum, combining classroom instruction with speech, behavioural, and occupational therapy. By integrating specialised care with structured education, the centres aim to ensure that children with autism receive the support necessary to develop communication skills and participate more fully in society.

Parallel reforms are also taking place within Punjab's broader education system. The government has expanded the Danish School network, which provides high-quality residential education to talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. New campuses are being established in underserved districts, while facilities at existing schools continue to be upgraded. The province has also introduced nutrition programmes in thousands of public schools to combat childhood malnutrition and improve attendance. These school meal initiatives provide milk and other food items to students in economically vulnerable districts.

Collectively, these investments reflect a recognition that sustainable economic growth depends fundamentally on an educated, skilled, and healthy population.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN MOBILITY

Infrastructure development has been another major pillar of the Punjab government's agenda.

The province has launched a large-scale road rehabilitation campaign aimed at improving connectivity between cities, districts, and rural communities. Hundreds of road projects have been initiated under the "Sarkein Bahaal – Punjab

Khushhaal" programme, which focuses on repairing damaged roads and upgrading key transport corridors. Punjab's Green Bus initiative marked an important step toward modernising urban transport. The programme will deploy 1,500 electric buses across major cities, with the first fleets already introduced in Lahore, Wazirabad, Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Mianwali, and further expansion is underway. Designed for accessibility and sustainability, the buses carry around 80 passengers and are equipped with modern features such as GPS tracking, CCTV monitoring and wheelchair access.

The government has simultaneously begun work on the charging infrastructure needed to support the new fleet. Looking ahead, large-scale transit projects — including new mass transit corridors and underground rail systems — are also being considered as part of Punjab's long-term urban planning strategy.

Punjab has also moved decisively to expand access to clean drinking water and modern sanitation infrastructure. Under a major provincial initiative, modern water filtration and treatment plants have been installed in 16 districts, including surface water schemes at Dharabi, Mairwal, and Phalina dams, with the first phase expected to improve safe water access for more than 29 million people. In addition, the government approved the installation of approximately 960 modern water filtration units province-wide, ensuring that clean drinking water reaches hundreds of rural communities.

Parallel upgrades of sewerage networks and wastewater treatment plants are underway to improve sanitation in smaller cities and towns, with thousands of kilometres of drainage lines being modernised.

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Environmental protection has also emerged as an





important policy priority for the Punjab government, particularly in response to the recurring challenge of winter smog in major urban centres.

Over the past year, the provincial administration launched an extensive anti-smog campaign combining regulatory enforcement with structural reforms. Industrial units were subjected to stricter emissions monitoring, while brick kilns were required to adopt environmentally friendly zig-zag technology, significantly reducing particulate emissions.

Construction regulations were also tightened, with dust-control measures introduced for large development projects. Authorities increased inspections of industrial zones and imposed penalties on facilities found violating environmental standards. Transport reforms have played a complementary role in the anti-smog strategy. The introduction of electric Green Buses in urban centres represents part of a broader effort to reduce vehicular emissions — one of the major contributors to air pollution in Punjab's cities.

While smog remains a complex challenge influenced by multiple regional factors, these measures represent a concerted attempt to move Punjab toward cleaner air and more sustainable urban development.

In parallel, the government has promoted rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge projects across the province, ensuring that new buildings capture

and reuse rainwater while large-scale recharge sites help replenish underground aquifers. These measures complement urban greening and the Green Bus initiative in reducing environmental stress and improving the sustainability of Punjab's cities.

## STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Punjab's health sector has seen significant expansion over the past year, with new facilities and service delivery models aimed at improving access to care across the province.

Among the most notable projects is the Nawaz Sharif Cancer Institute in Lahore, which is being developed as a major public-sector cancer treatment facility. Once completed, the hospital will provide advanced oncology services to thousands of patients who currently face limited treatment options.

The government has focused on strengthening healthcare services at the district level. Cardiac catheterisation laboratories (Cath Labs) are being established and upgraded in several public hospitals, enabling patients to receive life-saving cardiac procedures closer to home rather than travelling to major cities.

Significant efforts have also been directed toward improving primary healthcare infrastructure. Basic Health Units (BHUs), Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals



(THQs), and District Headquarters Hospitals (DHQs) are being upgraded across the province to improve diagnostic capabilities, staffing, and patient facilities.

Programmes providing free medicines at public hospitals have been expanded, helping reduce the financial burden of treatment on lower-income households. Clinics on Wheels and field hospitals have been deployed in several districts, providing diagnostic tests, maternal healthcare, vaccinations, and emergency services in areas where permanent healthcare facilities are limited.

The Punjab government is establishing a state-of-the-art Medical City in Lahore, modelled after international, high-tech healthcare hubs, and will provide high-quality modern medical facilities to the people of Punjab.

Taken together, these initiatives represent an effort to address longstanding disparities in access to healthcare by strengthening both hospital infrastructure and community-based medical services.

## **SOCIAL WELFARE AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Social protection programmes have also expanded during the past year, with several initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable populations.

One such programme is the Himmat Card, which provides financial assistance to persons with disabilities who are unable to work. Through this initiative, eligible individuals receive regular cash support to help meet basic needs.

The government has also launched programmes to distribute assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and prosthetic limbs to individuals with disabilities, improving mobility and independence for thousands of beneficiaries.

Women's economic empowerment has been another area of focus. Training programmes and entrepreneurship initiatives are being organised to support women entering small businesses and digital commerce.

In addition, the provincial government has introduced large-scale Ramadan relief initiatives to assist low-income families during the holy month. These programmes include financial support packages and community kitchens providing free meals to those in need.

While such welfare programmes address immediate economic challenges, policymakers emphasise that they are designed to complement broader economic reforms and employment initiatives.

## **INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND REGULATORY OVERSIGHT**

Beyond development projects, the Punjab government has also undertaken important institutional reforms.

A major step in this direction has been the creation of the Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Authority (PAFDA). The new authority has been established to strengthen regulatory oversight of food safety, medicines, and agricultural inputs.

Previously, responsibility for these areas was divided among multiple departments, often leading to gaps in enforcement. PAFDA consolidates these functions within a single regulatory body, enabling more effective monitoring and testing of products available in the market.

The authority is well on its way to developing modern laboratories, expanding inspection systems, and introducing digital tracking mechanisms to combat adulteration and counterfeit products.



In a province where food safety and substandard medicines have long been public concerns, the establishment of PAFDA represents a significant step toward improving consumer protection and public health.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety reforms have also featured prominently in the government's agenda.

Punjab Police have modernised operations through body cameras, digital reporting systems, and expanded Safe City surveillance networks, while specialised units such as the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and Crime and Criminals Department (CCD) have been strengthened to prevent terrorism and tackle organised crime more effectively.

Traffic management has also been prioritised, with stricter enforcement of road safety regulations leading to improvements in helmet compliance and reductions in certain categories of accidents.

Complementing technological upgrades, training programmes emphasise community policing and respectful engagement with citizens, aiming to build safer, more responsive law enforcement across the province.

## CULTURAL REVIVAL

Punjab also witnessed a renewed emphasis on cultural revival and heritage preservation during the year. The successful execution of Basant this year, held without major incidents, not only revived Lahore's festive

spirit but also provided a boost to local businesses across the city.

The Punjab government has also undertaken a series of cultural and heritage initiatives under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Historic sites, including the Sikh-era Hammam, Athdara Pavilion, and Loh Temple at Lahore Fort, were restored and reopened, while the Multan Clock Tower and other provincial landmarks were rehabilitated as civic heritage sites. Museums and galleries, such as the Bhagat Singh Gallery at Poonch House and expanded exhibits at the Harappa Museum, enhanced public access to history and culture.

Urban beautification projects, including canal landscaping, pedestrian-friendly streets, redesigned vendor carts, and Punjabi-language signage on public boards, brought heritage and aesthetics into daily city life. Inclusive celebrations of Christmas further reinforced the government's emphasis on cultural revival, diversity, and community engagement.

## A PROVINCE IN TRANSITION

Punjab's development agenda over the past year reflects an attempt to combine immediate welfare relief with long-term structural reforms.

For millions of citizens across Punjab — whether students receiving better educational opportunities, commuters benefiting from modern public transport, or families accessing improved healthcare services — these changes are beginning to reshape everyday life across the province ■

*The writer is the editor-in-chief of Horizon.*



# PARADOX OF DIPLOMATIC ASCENDANCY, CRICKETING DESCENDANCY



SAFDAR ALI DANISH

In 2026, Pakistan stands at an unusual intersection of confidence and contradiction. Diplomatically, the country has projected firmness, strategic maturity, and negotiation leverage in international cricket forums. Yet on the field, particularly against India, the national cricket team continues to reflect fragility, inconsistency, and psychological hesitation. The contrast is ironic as well as alarming.

The latest chapter unfolded at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, where the Indian national cricket team defeated Pakistan by 61 runs in their Group A encounter of the T20 World Cup 2026. India posted 175/7 in 20 overs, propelled by a blistering 77 off 40 deliveries from Ishan Kishan. Pakistan's

response never carried conviction. The chase lacked structure, the bowling lacked penetration, and the body language lacked belief.

India advanced to the Super 8 stage with authority. Pakistan was left confronting uncomfortable truths.

“ WHEN FACING INDIA, PAKISTAN'S PLAYERS OFTEN SEEM BURDENED BY EXPECTATION RATHER THAN LIBERATED BY OPPORTUNITY. ”



## A GOVERNANCE STORM BEFORE THE STORM

The tournament itself began under a cloud of controversy. The removal of the Bangladesh national cricket team from the competition and their replacement by the Scotland national cricket team sparked widespread debate. Questions were raised regarding fairness, transparency, and procedural consistency within the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Disputes related to hosting arrangements, security concerns, and scheduling under the hybrid model involving India and Sri Lanka intensified criticism. Pakistan openly expressed solidarity with Bangladesh during the controversy, framing its position as a defence of equitable governance rather than narrow self-interest.

In response to the escalating row, Mohsin Naqvi, Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), held prolonged discussions at Gaddafi Stadium with Bangladesh Cricket Board President Aminul Islam and an ICC delegation that included Deputy Chairman Imran Khwaja.

Pakistan eventually agreed to play against India, but the optics were significant. ICC leadership engaging directly in Lahore underscored Pakistan's diplomatic weight within global cricket. Venue recalibrations and structured negotiations signalled that Pakistan could assert its concerns diplomatically and strategically. In boardrooms, Pakistan appeared composed and influential. In contrast, on the cricket field, it appeared uncertain and reactive.

## THE PERSISTENT PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIER

The recurring defeats against India in ICC tournaments have become a pattern. Since the inception of the T20

World Cups, India has historically dominated Pakistan in major ICC events, with only rare exceptions disrupting the trend.

The explanation is not a lack of skill. Pakistan possesses explosive batters, quality pacers, and natural flair. The issue is psychological steel.

When facing India, Pakistan's players often seem burdened by expectation rather than liberated by opportunity. Eleven cricketers walk onto the field carrying the emotional voltage of over 250 million people. Pressure is inevitable, but elite teams convert pressure into discipline.

India's approach is clinical: calculated power play aggression, middle-over consolidation, and death-over precision. Pakistan's approach oscillates between over-caution and panic acceleration.

In Colombo, chasing 176 was well within reach in modern T20 standards. Instead of constructing the innings methodically, Pakistan's batting order collapsed under incremental pressure. Partnerships dissolved. Shot selection betrayed anxiety.

## TACTICAL GAPS AND STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS

Pakistan's defeat laid bare a set of tactical gaps and structural weaknesses that have persisted in its T20 approach for several years.

Allowing Ishan Kishan to dominate without sustained tactical disruption exposed planning deficiencies. Modern T20 cricket thrives on data analytics, match-up strategies, and scenario modelling, yet Pakistan's approach appeared largely conventional. The issue was compounded by a long-standing middle-order vulnerability. For years, Pakistan has struggled to

maintain stability once early wickets fall, and when pressure builds the recovery blueprint often appears unclear.

Fielding standards further widened the gap. Dropped chances and slow boundary coverage continue to separate Pakistan from elite sides, where athleticism and sharp fielding are non-negotiable in the T20 format. Beyond the field, administrative instability has also contributed to structural weakness. Frequent changes in coaching staff, selection panels, and captaincy reflect a reactionary approach, and no elite cricketing nation sustains success amid persistent turbulence.

## A FEW QUESTIONS

Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has demonstrated diplomatic engagement and assertiveness in governance disputes. However, cricket reform demands more than negotiation skill; it demands institutional transformation.

Under his leadership, PCB must confront hard realities:

- 1: Is the selection merit-driven and transparent?
- 2: Is there a five-year performance blueprint?
- 3: Are sports psychologists and analytics teams fully integrated?
- 4: Is domestic cricket producing temperament or merely talent?

Diplomacy can enhance Pakistan's standing internationally. But without cricketing excellence, that standing remains incomplete.

Where Pakistan truly stands in T20 World Cup 2026. Technically, Pakistan may still qualify depending on group permutations. But tournaments are rarely won by mathematical survival; they are won by rhythm and confidence.

At present, Pakistan appears tactically inconsistent and psychologically unsettled. To win the T20 World Cup 2026 from this position would require an extraordinary shift in mindset and execution.

Is victory possible for Pakistan? The answer is yes, but it is contingent upon one condition: structural reform must begin immediately.

## THE ROAD FORWARD: REFORM, NOT REACTION

For Pakistan cricket to regain credibility, the PCB must initiate decisive reforms. Institutional stability is essential: cyclical sackings must end, and coaching as well as captaincy frameworks should be allowed time to mature. At the same time, sports psychology integration needs to become a standard component of team preparation, with high-pressure conditioning made mandatory so that matches against India are treated as routine contests rather than mythologised encounters.

Equally important is the transition toward data-driven cricket. Pakistan must invest in advanced analytics departments comparable to those of leading cricket boards. Domestic excellence also requires attention through the rebuilding of domestic tournaments with stronger competitive integrity and greater pitch diversity. Finally, accountability must be exercised with dignity; criticism should focus on systemic shortcomings rather than devolving into scapegoating individuals.

## A DEFINING CROSSROADS

Pakistan today projects diplomatic confidence. It negotiates firmly, aligns strategically, and asserts its institutional voice within global cricket governance. But cricket is the nation's most visible mirror. The defeat in Colombo is a loss and a warning.

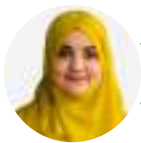
Eleven players may carry the nerves of 250 million people. Yet nerves must transform into steel. Talent must transform into a system. Emotion must transform into execution.

If the PCB leadership transforms diplomatic maturity into meaningful structural reform within cricket, Pakistan can still rewrite its T20 World Cup 2026 narrative. The era of cosmetic adjustments and reactionary measures is over; what this moment demands is courageous, comprehensive reform rooted in vision, stability, and institutional accountability ■

*The author, who holds an MPhil in English Literature, is an educationist and political analyst.*



# PMYP TO ESTABLISH FINTECH DIVISION, EXPAND YOUTH LOAN SCHEME



SABA ALI

Youth development in Pakistan is entering a more structured and technology-driven phase as the government moves to expand financial opportunities for young entrepreneurs. At an event held on 24 February 2026, at the PTV Headquarters in Islamabad, the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) launched the Impact Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme (PMYB&ALS) while also announcing the establishment of a dedicated FinTech Division to modernise youth access to finance.

The event brought together representatives from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the State Bank of Pakistan, parliamentarians, policymakers, financial

institutions, and media organisations to review the progress of the government's flagship youth financing initiative.

Prepared with technical support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the impact report

“ WITH EXPANDED FINANCING AND NEW DIGITAL TOOLS, YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS BEING POSITIONED AS A CENTRAL DRIVER OF PAKISTAN'S FUTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH. ”



“ PMYB&ALS HAS BECOME A KEY PLATFORM FOR ENABLING YOUNG PAKISTANIS TO TRANSFORM BUSINESS IDEAS INTO VIABLE ENTERPRISES THROUGH ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE FINANCING. ”



documents the scheme’s role in supporting youth-led businesses and agriculture ventures across the country. Since its launch, PMYB&ALS has emerged as a key platform for providing affordable financing to start-ups, small enterprises, and agriculture initiatives led by young Pakistanis. The report highlights how access to structured financing has enabled many young entrepreneurs to transform business ideas into viable enterprises.

A major announcement at the event concerned the planned expansion of the loan scheme for the 2026–27 cycle. The overall allocation is proposed to increase from Rs200 billion to Rs300 billion, reflecting growing demand for youth financing and the programme’s expanding reach. In addition, the Tier-3 loan ceiling — currently capped at Rs7.5 million — is under review for a potential increase to between Rs20 million and Rs30 million. The proposed revision is intended to support start-ups that are ready to scale into larger businesses.

The programme also outlined new measures aimed at improving financial inclusion for overseas Pakistanis. To encourage the use of formal remittance channels, digital bank accounts are being introduced for low-income workers in Gulf countries. Developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, commercial banks, and the State Bank of Pakistan,

the initiative aims to open between 100,000 and one million accounts during the current year, with a long-term target of 4.4 million accounts. Officials estimate that the initiative could generate an additional one billion dollars in annual remittances.

Another key development announced at the event was the establishment of a FinTech Division within PMYP. The new division is intended to expand the use of digital tools to improve access to financial services for young entrepreneurs. According to PMYP Chairman Rana Mashhood, the initiative will also support the creation of a unified digital footprint for universities across Pakistan within the next eighteen months. The effort aims to improve data coordination between educational institutions and employment and entrepreneurship programmes, helping students transition more smoothly from education to the job market.

Speaking at the launch, Rana Mashhood emphasised that youth development initiatives are increasingly being designed around merit, transparency, and technology-based systems. He also highlighted the importance of collaboration between government institutions, financial organisations, the media, and educational stakeholders in ensuring that youth-focused programmes achieve their intended impact.

With the planned expansion of financing, the introduction of digital financial tools, and stronger coordination between institutions, PMYP is positioning youth entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic growth. As these initiatives move forward, policymakers hope they will help Pakistan’s large youth population translate talent and ambition into sustainable economic activity ■

*The writer is a digital media executive at the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme.*



# BARRISTER AMJAD MALIK ELEVATED AS PUNJAB MINISTER



**DR RANA KHALID MEHMOOD**

The elevation of Barrister Amjad Malik to honorary ministerial status has emerged as a major development for overseas Pakistanis within the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The move is being viewed not merely as an individual appointment, but as formal institutional recognition of the overseas community's growing political relevance and policy engagement. Barrister Amjad Malik serves as Vice Chairperson of the Overseas Pakistanis Commission Punjab and Chief Coordinator of PML-N Overseas All Chapters. On 12 February 2026, he met PML-N President Nawaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz at Jati Umra. The meeting was attended by senior provincial officials and party leaders, including Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, IG Punjab, Special

Assistant Rashid Nasrullah and PML-N UK President Ahsan Dar.

Discussions centred on the performance of the Overseas Pakistanis Commission, institutional reforms, grievance redressal mechanisms and future policy steps aimed at improving facilitation for overseas Pakistanis. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz reiterated that overseas Pakistanis represent a source of pride, investment and international credibility for Pakistan. She assured that their welfare, legal protection and institutional representation would remain a priority of the provincial government. A commemorative souvenir of the Overseas Pakistanis Commission Punjab was presented to the Chief Minister during the meeting.

## PRIME MINISTER ENGAGES PAKISTANI COMMUNITY IN DOHA



The federal government has also intensified direct outreach. During his official visit to Qatar, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with members of the Pakistani community in Doha. The interaction underscored the government's commitment to placing overseas Pakistanis at the centre of policy priorities.

The prime minister commended the community for contributing to Pakistan's economy through remittances and professional excellence, while also strengthening the country's global image. He reaffirmed that the government is working to improve services, remove administrative hurdles and expand overseas participation in national development initiatives.

Community representatives welcomed the engagement and congratulated the Prime Minister on strengthening ties with the Qatari leadership. They noted that expanding economic cooperation between Pakistan and Qatar could generate new employment and business opportunities for overseas Pakistanis.

## PML-N GERMANY MEETS DEFENCE MINISTER



In Munich, a delegation of the PML-N Germany Chapter met Federal Defence Minister Khawaja Asif to discuss diaspora contributions and future collaboration. Talks focused on remittances, business activity, and investment prospects, as well as challenges faced by Pakistanis residing in Germany. Both sides agreed on the importance of continued

institutional engagement to better address overseas Pakistanis' concerns.

## JAPAN CHAPTER STRENGTHENS ORGANISATIONAL COORDINATION



In Lahore, PML-N Japan President Malik Noor Awan met Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari to discuss party organisation and overseas coordination. The meeting reviewed recent political mobilisation in Japan and explored ways to strengthen communication between overseas chapters and provincial leadership. Both leaders emphasised the role of overseas Pakistanis in promoting a positive image of Pakistan internationally.

## HONG KONG CHAPTER HOSTS MUSLIM SCHOLARS



The PML-N Hong Kong Chapter, under General Secretary Rai Muhammad Ashraf Khan, convened a meeting of prominent Muslim scholars ahead of Ramadan. The session addressed religious harmony, community service initiatives and youth engagement, with participants stressing the importance of projecting a responsible and constructive Muslim identity within the broader Hong Kong society.

Collectively, these developments indicate a structured effort by PML-N to strengthen institutional representation, deepen diaspora engagement and integrate overseas perspectives more formally into governance and party strategy ■

# PICTURE GALLERY



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF MEETS THE AMIR OF QATAR, SHEIKH TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI, TO DISCUSS BILATERAL COOPERATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS. DOHA, 24 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES THE SPECIAL EVENT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PATHWAY FOR GLOBAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY AT THE VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE. VIENNA, 17 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF MEETS IAEA DIRECTOR GENERAL RAFAEL MARIANO GROSSI AT THE VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE. VIENNA, 17 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF AND AUSTRIAN CHANCELLOR CHRISTIAN STOCKER SHAKE HANDS AT THE FEDERAL CHANCELLERY. VIENNA, 16 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF LAUNCHES THE PM RAMZAN PACKAGE 2026. ISLAMABAD, 15 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF PRESENTS THE CERTIFICATE OF HONORARY PROFESSORSHIP OF NUST TO UZBEK PRESIDENT SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV. ISLAMABAD, 5 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ON KASHMIR SOLIDARITY DAY. MUZAFFARABAD, 5 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF AND VISITING KAZAKH PRESIDENT KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV UNVEIL PLAQUES FOR MUTUAL SPORTS AND EDUCATION CENTRES AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE. ISLAMABAD, 4 FEBRUARY 2026**



**WORLD BANK GROUP PRESIDENT AJAY BANGA CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF. ISLAMABAD, 2 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF AWARDS THE LICENCE OF PAKISTAN'S THIRD DIGITAL RETAIL BANK TO RAQAMI ISLAMIC DIGITAL BANK CHAIRMAN ABDULLAH AL-MUTAIRI. ISLAMABAD, 10 FEBRUARY 2026**



**PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF VISITS VARIOUS KIOSKS DURING AI INDUS WEEK, ORGANISED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY. ISLAMABAD, 9 FEBRUARY 2026**



**LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER OSAMA SAAD HAMAD AND FIELD MARSHAL KHALIFA HAFTAR HOLD MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF DURING THEIR VISIT TO PAKISTAN. ISLAMABAD, 3 FEBRUARY 2026**



**CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ SHARIF VISITS THE PROVINCIAL INTELLIGENCE FUSION AND THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTRE AND RECEIVES A BRIEFING ON LAW AND ORDER. LAHORE, 24 FEBRUARY 2026**



**LADY POLICE OFFICERS PRESENT A GUARD OF HONOUR TO HONHAAR STUDENTS AT THE REQUEST OF CHIEF MINISTER PUNJAB MARYAM NAWAZ SHARIF. 16 FEBRUARY 2026**



**FORMER CHIEF MINISTER OF PUNJAB HAMZA SHAHBAZ SHARIF MEETS PARTY WORKERS AT THE PML-N SECRETARIAT IN MODEL TOWN, LAHORE. FEBRUARY 2026**



**CHIEF MINISTER KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA SOHAIL AFRIDI CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF. ISLAMABAD, 2 FEBRUARY 2026**



# HORIZON

Research and Policy Planning Unit  
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