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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Praise Be to Allah (s.w.t)! The proud Pakistanis celebrated 79th Independence Day on 14th August, 2026 with traditional fervor and renewed commitment to work in unison for prosperity and happiness of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The inauguration of historic "Marka e Haq Monument," on eve of independence, in Islamabad manifests remarkable unity to consolidate ("Bunyan-ul-Marsoos," - Rock-Hard Wall) against India in May 7, 2025 war and any misadventure in future.

The celebrations especially marked Pakistan's unwavering support to the long standing right of self-determination of Kashmiris, against illegal occupation and blatant atrocities by India; as well as the recently signed Mecca Joint Defense Agreement on 7th August, 2026 by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan. This consolidates Pakistan as a global Peace-maker in wake of its earnest and hectic efforts to end of US Iran conflict in close cooperation of diplomatic fraternity in Middle East, Europe and all regions, to secure the world from an unimaginable human and socio-economic catastrophe.

Commemorating the Independence day, the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) hosted an enthralling Seminar: "Parliamentary System of Pakistan & the Role of PIPS in Inculcating Leadership" on 11th August, 2026, for participants from COMSATS University LeaderSHIFT, Attock Campus, and student delegates from Kinnaird College Lahore; GCU Lahore; Punjab University, Lahore; NUML Islamabad, AJK university Muzaffarabad; GCU Faisalabad; Federal Urdu University, Islamabad; Islamia University, Bahawalpur and University of Haripur. It also marked National Minorities Day. PIPS also held a three weeks Parliamentary Development Course for officials of Senate. This Issue of PIPS Parliamentary Research Digest includes absorbing articles on Indian intransigence over the Indus Waters Treaty, Pakistan's circular debt challenge and Legislative Progressivism in Pakistan. Our invaluable readers may send feedback or contact for our services at research@pips.gov.pk

Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka
Director General (Research)



Aug., 18, 2026: Group Photo of Participants of six-week PIPS Professional Development Training for Senate Sectt officials with Mr Asim Khan Goraya, ED, PIPS.

Quaid' Quote



Dealing with our first function in this Assembly, I cannot make any well-considered pronouncement at this moment, but I shall say a few things as they occur to me. The first and the foremost thing that I would like to emphasise is this – remember that you are now a Sovereign legislative body and you have got all the powers. It, therefore, places on you the gravest responsibility as to how you should take your decisions. The first observation that I would like to make is this. You will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a Government is to maintain law and order, so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the State.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Father of the Nation

First Hon President/Speaker of the National Assembly

Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.

Karachi

August 11, 1947

ANALYSIS

Indian Intransigence over the Indus Waters Treaty and Pakistan's Policy Options

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Deputy Director, PIPS

Abstract

This paper evaluates India's ongoing departures from Indus Water Treaty, specifically its unilateral action of constructing hydropower projects such as Kishanganga dam (Jhelum River) and Ratle dam, Kwar dam (Chenab River) raise serious technical and legal concerns for Pakistan. The recent developments by India have put Pakistan at a great risk of water scarcity. It has also challenged mandated design of treaty, notification procedures and undermines the established adjudication processes. The analysis depicts the implications of these actions in legal, political and hydrological context. It also suggests the policy options for Pakistan, which include diplomatic engagement, exploring the relevant International forums, strategic legal actions, improved technical oversight and enhanced national water management. This study determines that a coordinated, empirically grounded approach is critical to protecting Pakistan's right ensuring long term stability of the treaty framework.

1. Introduction:

Under the patronage of World Bank, Pakistan and India signed the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) on 19th September 1960. Treaty ensured the bilateral principles of water apportionment between both states. Water of western rivers; Indus, Chenab and Jhelum were given to Pakistan while waters of eastern rivers; Ravi, Satluj and Beas were given to the India. Additionally, India was allowed to irrigate some land in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and also allowed to construct some hydroelectric projects.¹ No one from the counterparts is allowed to change the agreement single handedly. After the Pehlgaam attacks India alleged Pakistan baselessly for its involvement and unilaterally declared to held in 'abeyance' the IWT. However, the IWT has no provision for this action. Such unilateral action is not allowed as per the International law and it is a clear violation of Vienna Convention on Law of treaties (VCLT). Moreover, India has expressed dissatisfaction on the IWT. It seeks modifications in the treaty obtain greater control over the western rivers. One of its examples is ratle dam which is proposed to be built in Kishtwar district of IOK. The dam can hold water between 50-60 days during winter which can affect Pakistan's Punjab Province which heavily

¹ Maham Naweed and Khadija Almus Khanum, *Purported "Abeyance" of the Indus Waters Treaty: Legal Options on the Way Forward — Executive Summary*, Policy Brief No. 9, ed. Dr. Raashid Wali Janjua (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, June 2025).

relies on Chenab's water.² Pakistan followed all the rules and remained committed to the mechanisms which are provided by the Treaty. India has not only violated the International agreement but also put the regional peace and stability at stake. At the outst Pakistan has no option left but to actively and effectively reach out to the International Forums for diplomatic outreach and engage the World to ensure its water rights.



Figure 1: Locations where India is constructing dams

Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)³

2. Aim of the Paper:

This study aims to evaluate the India's non-compliance and violation of the Indus Water Treaty and analyze Pakistan's strategic, diplomatic and legal options to protect its water rights and ensure sustainable water security.

3. Research Questions:

This paper will focus on the following two questions:

- i. How has India violated and challenged the Indus Waters Treaty?
- ii. How can Pakistan strengthen its water security and treaty rights?

² Abid Hussain, "Can India stop Pakistan's river water — and will it spark a new war?" *Al Jazeera*, July 9, 2025.

³ Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "Can India Cut Off Pakistan's Indus River Lifeline?," CSIS, November 2025.

4. Situational Analysis:

- **India's Stance:** Indian Government urged Pakistan to initiate intergovernmental discussion for the review and modifications of the Indus water Treaty, pointing out following concerns:

India alleges that Pakistan is breaching the Treaty because of the simultaneous proceedings taking place before the Neutral Expert ("NE") and Court of Arbitration ("CoA") Fundamental. India claims that since the Treaty's conclusion many unforeseen developments have taken place which necessitates a reassessment of IWT provisions.⁴ India's justifies its position for proposed changes in the wake of increasing demands for clean energy development and carbon emission reductions as well as changes in agriculture and water related demands. India maintains its stance of necessary revision in the IWT especially the dispute resolution mechanism by the baseless allegations of cross border terrorism and evolving security situation in IOK. According to India, certain provisions were time bound and are no longer relevant. As the upper riparian state, the rights of the India were unduly restricted making it difficult for India to develop and regulate water resources to fulfill its needs.⁵ Ijaz Hussain cites two reasons for India's intentions of revising treaty i) India is increasingly becoming water scarce country. The per capita water availability has dropped from 5000 m³/annum in 1947 to less than 2000 m³/annum in 1997 and is further expected to drop to 1500 m³/year in 2025, ii) India wants to keep Pakistan under pressure mainly for security reasons.⁶

- **Pakistan's Stance:** Pakistan maintained following position in response to Indian demand:

India's stance of foundational change is illegal and not justifies any change in the IWT. Since six decades the International Water Treaty has proved to be an effective protocol for addressing cross border disputes and concerns over water.⁷ For communication and resolution of the disputes the appropriate forum is Permanent Indus Commission ("PIC"). Pakistan believes that the redressal mechanism is in place in the form of PIC which should be utilized instead of any direct government-to-government negotiations. India should submit a formal statement of concern that must clearly identify specific

⁴ 'Transcript of the Press Briefing by the Spokesperson on Thursday 19 September 2024' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan) <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/transcript-of-the-press-briefing-by-the-spokesperson-on-thursday-19-september-2024> accessed 2 May 2025.

⁵ Naweed and Khanum, *Indus Waters Treaty* (2025).

⁶ Ijaz Hussain, *Indus Waters Treaty: Political and Legal Dimensions* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷ 'Statement by Foreign Secretary on the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)' (Ministry of External Affairs, 23 April 2025) <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?>

provisions Indian government seeks to amend.⁸ The formal channel established under IWT is best channel for dispute resolution.

5. Policy Options for Pakistan:⁹

- I. **Indus Water Treaty's Existing Protocol can be used to Resolve the Issue:** Pakistan can plead its case as a legal dispute before CoA which is designated by World Bank under the article IX of the international Water Treaty. By taking this route, Pakistan can not only show its commitment to resolve this issue but also ensure that IWT is still valid and binding to it in spite of India's unilateral declaration.
- II. **An Advisory Opinion can be sought from the "International Court of Justice":** Pakistan can engage International Organizations to seek advisory opinion from international court of justice as due to certain limitations Pakistan cannot take this case unilaterally to the ICJ. An advisory opinion can be sought through World Bank from ICJ on the legal status of India's alleged "abeyance" of the IWT. On behalf of the South Asian Region an expert opinion can also be sought from the "UNGA" by furnishing this issue as whole regions' problem. An advisory opinion can also be sought from "UNSC" by highlighting this issue as a violation of international laws involving UNO in it.
- III. **World Bank can be engaged for Mediation:** As the World Bank is genuine broker of International Water Treaty its role is very crucial to settle this issue. In order to implement the Treaty's dispute resolving protocols, Pakistan should continuously plead its case to the World Bank to ensure its trustee role for resolving this issue as soon as possible.
- IV. **Issue can be Highlighted Internationally using United Nations Security Council Platform:** Pakistan has the option to raise this issue to UNSC by highlighting the India's actions are posing a serious threat to regional and International peace. Such acts are also considered as an act of war and aggression. In order to maintain Regional and International peace, the UNSC can intervene and use its powers given under the UN Charter and make certain recommendations or provisional steps to resolve this issue.
- V. **Bilateral as well as Multilateral Channels can be used to Mobilize Diplomatic Support:** Seeking help from allies like China, Turkey and also the multilateral organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Islamic

⁸ Naweed and Khanum, *Indus Waters Treaty* (2025).

⁹ Naweed and Khanum, *Indus Waters Treaty* (2025).

Cooperation Organization (“OIC”) can also play a pivotal role to help Pakistan building pressure on our counterparts. The collective and coordinated efforts can definitely highlight the Pakistan’s legitimacy and strengthen its position according to the International law.

- VI. **Develop the Narrative on Cross-Border Water Cooperation:** In the world 153 countries possess shared territories with at least 286 trans-boundary lakes, rivers basins and also within trans-boundary existing aquifer systems. In context of trans-boundary management and water governance, this heinous act of India will set a bad precedent. Pakistan should articulate publically the India’s actions which are hugely affecting and violating International law and IWT agreement. Accentuating the humanitarian risks and ecological imbalances to millions of the people in region can attract world’s attention and support for Pakistan’s narrative.
- VII. **Prepare a Legal document examining on treaty violations:** A comprehensive legal document/ white paper should be developed by Pakistan which should outline all the actions, reflecting India’s violations regarding IWT and also analyzing the future potential breaches which are addressable under International Law. Pakistan can use this paper as reference domestically and also as an International advocacy tool.
- VIII. **Establish dams/ storage facilities to expand storage capacity:** Currently, the country maintains three key multipurpose reservoirs i.e. Chashma, Tarbela and Mangla in addition to 19 barrages and 12 inter-river link canals. The storage capacity is 5 million acre-feet (MAF) water enough for around four weeks. Pakistan is also building two more dams on Indus River (Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand) due for completion in 2028 and 2029 which will increase capacity by another 09 MAF. In order to save the lives of 270 million population, the government should expand its storage capacity by building new dams. The race has begun between two countries and Pakistan must act now to avoid the risk of any potential water shortage in future.¹⁰

6. Conclusion:

Pakistan’s Water Security is at great risk by India’s persistent non-compliance of the Indus Water Treaty. In case to protect the national interest, Pakistan needs to strengthen legal, diplomatic and strategic responses. Implementation of robust and evidence based policy measures will ensure the sustainable water management and clarify the rights which Pakistan reserves about the treaty.

¹⁰ Abid Hussain, “Can India stop Pakistan’s river water — and will it spark a new war?” *Al Jazeera*, July 9, 2025.

OPINION**Legislative Progressivism in Pakistan****Mr. Wajid Aslam**

Assistant Coordination Officer (Research), PIPS

1. Introduction

Legislative Progressivism in Pakistan can be defined as the evolution of the law, constitutional rights and parliamentary structures towards greater democracy, inclusiveness and security of rights, social support and the ability of the state to respond to new challenges. Legislative progressivism should be understood not merely as the enactment of new laws, but as the gradual transformation of the legal system to protect human dignity, equality, social justice, democratic participation and the rights of vulnerable groups. The country's constitutional framework itself provides a progressive foundation through fundamental rights, equality before law, freedom of expression and association, protection of minorities, women's participation, social justice and the right to education.

The number of laws passed by Parliament is not the only matter. The more significant question is whether there has been an expansion of rights, enhancement of equality, introduction of mechanisms to hold the government accountable, protection of vulnerable groups, and greater opportunity for citizens' meaningful involvement in the nation's political, social and economic life through legislation. A solid base is already provided by the Constitution itself on the bases of fundamental rights; equality before law, freedom of speech, freedom of association, protection from discrimination and right to information. The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 represents one of the most consequential progressive developments in Pakistan's constitutional history. It strengthened parliamentary democracy, restored the parliamentary character of the Constitution, enhanced provincial autonomy and abolished the Concurrent Legislative List. It also inserted Article 25-A, making free and compulsory education for children between five and sixteen years a constitutional right. This transformed education from a policy aspiration into an enforceable constitutional commitment.

2. Progressive Legislative Framework in Pakistan¹

Parliament has also enacted laws in areas which were not adequately covered by the law over the last 20 years, such as women's workplace protection, women's property rights, child protection, juvenile justice, transgender rights, disability rights, anti-rape procedures, climate change, legal aid and digital governance and electoral inclusion. In short, the country is making great progress in legislative arena and the Parliament is trying to keep up the pace at par with the world in the making of progressive laws. For instance;

¹ Ministry of law and justice, "the Pakistan Code", Date: 19/08/2026, <https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/index.php>.

i. Women Rights and Gender Equality:

Pakistan has progressively expanded the legal recognition of women's rights and gender equality. The Constitution guarantees equality before law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, while **Article 34** calls for full participation of women in national life. Parliament enacted the National Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2012, giving institutional expression to gender equality. The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 created a legal mechanism against workplace harassment, while the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020 strengthened women's ability to obtain their lawful property inheritance.

The criminal-law framework has also moved substantially towards protecting women from violence. Legislative reforms have addressed honor crimes, acid attacks, sexual violence, rape, forced marriage, harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 aimed to enhance the mechanisms for investigating and trial of rape in the context of specialized procedures, institutional arrangements etc. Most recently the federal Parliament passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2026, which is another milestone towards the formal recognition of domestic violence as a matter not just of the private family sphere. The provinces too, have complemented federal changes with their own gender related legislations.

ii. Protection of Children:

Child-rights is another key area in the process of law development. The National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017 was passed by Parliament to create an institutional framework to track and advance the rights of children. The Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018 created a rights-based approach to children in conflict with the law, focusing on rehabilitations and on alternatives to traditional criminal justice sanctions. Further strengthening of child protection against child abuse, abduction and disappearance was achieved through enactment of the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act, 2018 and Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020. Last but not the least, The Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2025 is yet another recent addition to the legislative landscape concerning child protection, which is continuously evolving to address current challenges in society.

iii. Persons with disabilities:

Pakistan has also taken important steps in law making with regard to persons with disabilities. The ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020 is a rights-based approach that is grounded in dignity, equality, accessibility, reasonable accommodation, inclusive education and

participation. Physical, mental, intellectual, developmental and sensory disabilities are identified under the law while removing physical, social, communication and attitudinal barriers.

Parliament has also followed this agenda in the bills on dyslexia and accessibility for the deaf. The shift to the rights of persons with disabilities to participate meaningfully in society is reflected in the new laws: Dyslexia Special Measures Act, 2022 and Access to the Media (Deaf) Persons Act, 2022.

iv. Minority rights:

Likewise, there has been a growing legislative interest in minority rights. Article 36 of the Constitution provides for safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of minorities. This was enhanced by Parliament with the National Commission for Minorities Rights Act, 2025. The purpose of the commission is “To protect and promote the social, economic, political and legal rights of minorities in all parts of Pakistan”. This is a significant institutional step as progressive legislation must be backed up by a monitoring system that can track implementation of the laws. There is also evidence of growing pluralism in the legislative history of Pakistan, with a focus on religious and family laws. For instance, the Hindu Marriage Act, 2017, was enacted to give a legal framework for Hindu marriage and registration. This piece of legislation takes into account that citizens of different faith communities need legal protection of their personal status, family life and civil rights in order to have equal citizenship.

v. Promoting Education through Legislation:

In the area of education, Parliament has moved progressively from institution-building toward rights-based access. Article 25-A established the constitutional right to free and compulsory education, while the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2012 provided an ICT-level legislative framework. Parliament has also established institutions focused on technology, skills, higher education and specialized learning. Recent legislation includes the National Institute of Technology Act, 2025, the National Excellence Institute Act, 2025, and the Daanish Schools Authority Act, 2026.

vi. Labor rights and social protection:

Labor rights and social protection constitute another important domain of legislative progress. Pakistan has statutory protections relating to minimum wages, employment of children, industrial relations, employees’ old-age benefits, social insurance, occupational protection and workers’ welfare.

vii. Criminal Justice Reforms:

There has been a gradual improvement in access to justice and criminal justice reform in Pakistan. The Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2020 aims to enhance access to legal aid, especially for the less privileged citizens. The Alternative Dispute Resolution Act, 2017 encourages alternative dispute resolution processes to help minimize delays and expenses. The Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Act, 2017 acknowledges the need for protection of those who help courts to determine the truth in the exercise of criminal justice. Another relevant development for rights in relation to protection from abuse in custody is the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act 2022.

viii. Institutionalization of Human rights:

Strides have been made towards human rights institutionalization through the establishment of independent statutory institutions. They include; The National Commission for Human Rights Act, 2012, the National Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2012, the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017, and the recent National Commission on the Rights of Minorities Rights Act, 2025 show an institutional effort towards protection of human rights without focusing solely on courts and government departments.

ix. Environmental Protection and Climate Change:

Legislation has also been carried out in the area of environmental protection and climate change in Pakistan. The Pakistan Environmental Protection Act, 1997 laid the foundation of modern environmental regulatory framework. The Pakistan Climate Change Act, 2017 further created the Pakistan Climate Change Council and Climate Change Authority framework, which incorporated mitigation, adaptation and climate governance in the legal framework.

Recent legislation reflects that environmental progressivism is evolving from the simple concept of control of pollution to sustainable development. The New Energy Vehicles Adoption Levy Act, 2025 and the Islamabad Capital Territory (Prohibition of Plastic Book Covers) Act, 2026 show a trend towards the development of laws related to cleaner transportation and resource utilization, also reducing plastic wastes.

x. Progress in Electoral laws:

The Elections Act, 2017, which updated and unified Pakistan's election regulations, has also enhanced electoral democracy. Transparency, institutional responsibilities, women's and marginalized groups' engagement, election administration, and political process regulation have

all received more attention in the legislative framework. Since political equality is the cornerstone of other rights, this is a crucial element of legislative progressivism.

xi. Protection of Vulnerable Migrants:

Pakistan has passed numerous laws pertaining to migration, human trafficking, and the protection of vulnerable migrants. Stronger protection against exploitation and organized trafficking networks is demonstrated by “the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018”, and “The Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act, 2018”. In 2025, Parliament has made various changes in these laws related to trafficking, smuggling, and emigration.

xii. Digital rights and technological governance:

A new area of legislative progressivism is emerging: digital rights and technical governance. Pakistan's first legal framework for cybercrimes was created by the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, and a more comprehensive move toward digital governance and a digitally enabled economy is represented by the Digital Nation Pakistan Act, 2025. It ensures the promotion of digital change and innovation while concurrently safeguarding people's rights, privacy, freedom of expression, and cyber security.

3. Future Course of Action for Parliament

All in all, Pakistan has moved progressively across multiple legislative domains. At the same time, legislative progressivism should not be measured simply by the number of Acts passed. The real test is whether laws change lives. A progressive legal framework must be accompanied by adequate institutions, budgets, enforcement mechanisms, public awareness, judicial capacity, reliable data and parliamentary oversight. Therefore, Parliament must take following actions to fill the implementation gaps and take the agenda forward;

- i. Mandatory Legislative Impact Assessment is the key to check whether a law is providing the desired outcome or not. For all the important laws, there should be the provisions of Impact Assessment where Parliament could directly check the progress and implantation status of the laws.
- ii. Institutionalizing post-legislative scrutiny through standing committees to assess whether laws are achieving their intended objectives after implementation is another key area where parliaments can make progress towards implementations of law.
- iii. Relevant ministries and departments should periodically report on progress, enforcement, budgets, institutional capacity and challenges to Parliamentary standing committees, so that,

responsible officials could be questioned by the Parliamentarians and held responsible for gaps in implementation.

- iv. Parliament should make gender, disability and social-inclusion assessments an integral part of the legislative process to ensure that proposed laws do not unintentionally exclude or disadvantage vulnerable groups.
- v. The legislation should be linked with the fiscal impact assessments, so that, rights based commitments are backed by realistic and sustainable financial resources.
- vi. Simplifying the legal framework will reduce confusion, improve enforcement and make laws more accessible to citizens. Therefore, regular review of obsolete laws is need of the hour for identification of outdated laws.
- vii. Enhancing the Research capacity of Parliament may enable lawmakers to use credible information as a basis for drafting, reviewing and modifying legislation. Having more information and resources for independent research will allow legislators to determine gaps, evaluate policy choices and predict the effects of proposed legislation.
- viii. Parliament should encourage youth engagement through consultations, hearings, policy dialogues, and digital platforms to get their thoughts. Special focus should be placed on topics of employment, technology, education, climate change and new social problems.

4. Conclusion

As the records demonstrate, Pakistan has made substantial progress in legislation. However, the country's next phase of legislative progressivism should therefore focus on implementation gaps. Parliament must increasingly move from asking, "Have we legislated?" to asking, "Has the legislation produced measurable change?" To achieve the purpose, Parliamentary committees can play a central role through post-legislative scrutiny, implementation hearings, gender and human-rights impact assessments, stakeholder consultations and evidence-based review. The most important lesson from Pakistan's legislative journey is that Parliament has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to respond to new social realities. From women's rights and child protection to disability inclusion, minority rights, climate change, transparency and digital transformation, our law-making has gradually expanded the circle of legal protection. Now, the responsibility before the parliamentarians is to make the next generation of legislation more anticipatory rather than reactive. Artificial intelligence, climate migration, demographic change, digital privacy, misinformation, ageing populations, emerging forms of employment and new technologies will require Parliament to legislate before vulnerabilities become crises.

In the end, Legislative progressivism, ultimately, is about placing the citizen at the center of law-making. A progressive Parliament is one that protects the vulnerable, empowers the marginalized, enables opportunities, safeguards fundamental freedoms, promotes accountability and ensures that development reaches every segment of society. In a nutshell, consolidating the successes, filling implementation gaps, and ensuring that every progressive bill becomes a reality for the Pakistani people are the tasks faced by the Parliament.

ANALYSIS

Circular Debt: Why Renewable Sources Aren't Replacing Fossil Fuels Yet

Aniqa Sattar, PIPS summer Intern,
Riphah International University

1. Introduction

International energy dynamics are changing rapidly, with most countries shifting towards cleaner, renewable sources of energy to address the challenges of climate change, economic uncertainty, and energy insecurity. Pakistan's transition towards this process is, however, still underpinned by chronic and entrenched issue of circular debt in its power sector. Circular debt was brought into public debate for the first time more than a decade ago. Today, circular debt (CD) is one of the most important structural hurdles to energy reform in Pakistan.

Pakistan has immense potential for renewable energy. It's enriched with solar irradiance, promising wind corridors, considerable hydropower potential and rich biomass resources. Pakistan still depends excessively on imported fossil fuels for power generation. This excessive dependence has driven the sector deeper into economic chaos. Although policies and incentives have been launched to encourage renewable energy, their effects have been curbed by institutional inefficiencies, poor long-term planning and fiscal hollowness compounded by the circular debt crisis.

The following evidence examines the complex connection between circular debt and renewable energy adoption in Pakistan. It probes the question of why, in the face of obvious benefits and increasing pressure for cleaner options, fossil fuel continues to predominate in the national energy mix. Through an analysis of the economic, political, and structural dynamics at work, the argument aims to bring into focus the reforms that would enable renewable energy to become a tangible and prevalent part of Pakistan's future energy plan.

2. Circular Debt Trap and Its Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan faces a serious fiscal danger as its circular debt in the power sector grows continuously. Since its inception in 2006, circular debt has steadily grown and had a detrimental effect on the state of the power sector as well as the economy. Circular debt accounted for PKR 111 billion in 2006, but by 2024, the power sector's circular debt had increased to PKR 2.4 trillion, or roughly 3.2% of Pakistan's total loans.¹ Cumulative losses from FY2006 to FY2024 have accounted for PKR 5.9 trillion, approximately,

¹ Ministry of Finance, *Fiscal Risk Statement*, Islamabad: Ministry of Finance, 2025.
https://www.finance.gov.pk/publications/Fiscal_Risk_Statement_March_2025.pdf

which represents 9% of the country's GDP.² Furthermore, defective collection systems also lead to a reduction in money collection, increasing the CD.

The Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act (FRDLA) distinguishes between circular debt and public debt. Despite this, the government's decision to include this debt in the public debt under pressure from the IMF will reduce investment in renewable energy projects and raise the possibility of price hikes and higher taxes. The IMF has also demanded to remove the surcharge limit from sukuk so that more taxes could be collected for paying off debt, ultimately putting the pressure on the public through the budget.

The root cause is very different from the proposed solutions. The primary cause of the rise in CD is the reliance on imported fuel for power generation. Imported fuel provides about 40% of the energy required by the power sector. The devaluation of the Pakistani currency and increases in fuel costs on an international level result in costly imports. The need for fuel types has also changed over the past years. The sector's oil percentage fell sharply from 47% in FY 1998 to 13% in FY 2022. In contrast, the percentage of RLNG (Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas) increased from 0.7% in 2015 to 25% in 2022; nonetheless, RLNG shortages resulted in a PKR 19,322 million loss in 2022. Additionally, the percentage of coal has grown from 0.5% in 2014 to 13% in 2022, with most of it coming from imports. This situation has made the CD a major challenge that needs to be resolved soon to avoid further financial and economic challenges.³

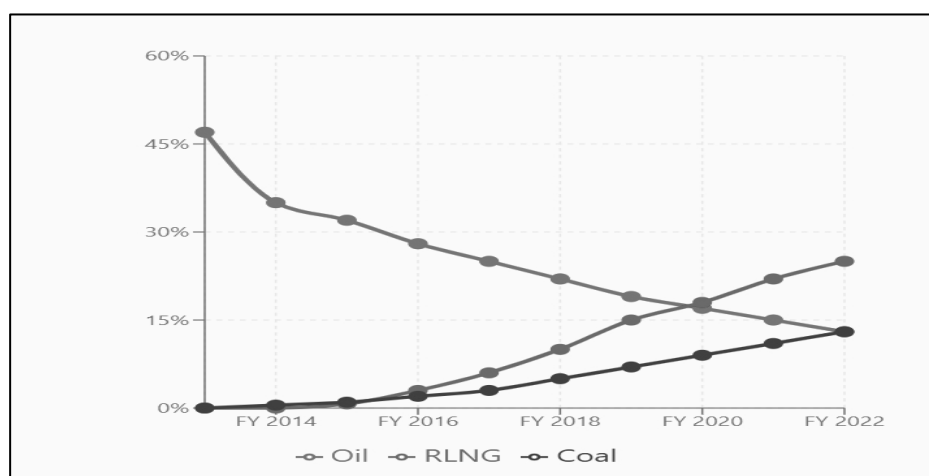


Figure 1: Pakistan's Energy Sector Transformation (1998-2022)

² Dr. Ghulam Mustafa, "Pakistan power sector challenges and way forward", *PIPS Parliamentary Research Digest*, December 2024 <https://www.pips.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Research-Digest-December-2024-Web.pdf>.

³ Mustafa, "Pakistan power sector challenges", 15 <https://www.pips.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Research-Digest-December-2024-Web.pdf>.

Furthermore, IPPs are unable to pay off their fuel import payments since the government is unable to disburse its payments. This leads to either purchasing fuel on credit or halting the production of electricity. Investors are hesitant to put their money into the electricity sector because of the government's inability to pay off the debt, which could result in stagnant returns. On top of that, a large chunk of the budget is devoted to paying off long-standing debt, which leaves little money available for investments in renewable energy sources. Only operational losses, such as electricity theft and poor collections, have been responsible for 89% of the yearly CD flow from FY2020 to FY2024. Low maintenance, deteriorating infrastructure, and a decline in service quality are the eventual results of this.⁴

The government bases its pricing decisions on household consumption rather than income, which is another noteworthy aspect. The World Bank claims that this data is frequently deceptive since it presents large, low-income joint households as wealthier due to their higher power consumption. Cross-subsidy also throws off the system because of unclear pricing, high-cost products, and hurdles that companies face in covering their costs.

Pakistan has many thermal power plants available for power production. CD negatively impacts the financial condition of the sector. Due to budgetary limitations, this finally requires these power facilities to either operate at low capacity or possibly shut down, which causes hours of load shedding. Pakistan has already lost 2000–2500 MW due to fuel shortages and financial difficulties faced by private companies. In recent years, this resulted in load-shedding for over 8 hours per day.

Pakistan charges between 30–40% higher electricity costs than nations like Malaysia, India, Turkey, and China because of its enormous debt load. In spite of subsidies, the cost of electricity has skyrocketed. Only the industrial sector has faced more than 640% increase in electricity tariffs since 2007. It has a detrimental impact on the production capacity and product prices.⁵

3. Pakistan's Renewable Energy Capacity

The world continues to grapple with climate change and is aiming to halve emissions by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2050.⁶ Due to its chronic proximity to major economies like China and

⁴ International Monetary Fund, Middle East and Central Asia Dept., *Pakistan: First Review Under the Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility, Requests for Modification of Performance Criteria and Request for an Arrangement Under the Resilience and Sustainable Facility* - Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Pakistan, IMF Staff Country Reports 2025, no. 109 (2025).

⁵ Mustafa, "Analysis of circular debt of power sector in Pakistan", 15
<https://www.pips.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Research-Digest-May-2024.pdf>.

⁶ United Nations, "Renewable Energy: Powering a Safer Future," United Nations, August 25, 2025.
<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy>.

India, Pakistan is also obligated to play a significant role in addressing this persistent problem. It can only be done by shifting our dependence from fossil fuels to renewable sources.

i. Solar Energy

Pakistan's land accounts for an area of 881,913 km² and is located between longitudes 62° and 75° east and latitudes 24° and 37° north, making it ideal for a solar energy source. Energy Information Administration (EIA) has shown that Pakistan can produce 5.3 kWh/m² (1.93 MWh/m² annually) through solar energy.⁷

According to a World Bank assessment Pakistan's entire electricity needs could be met by solar photovoltaic power produced from just 0.071 percent of its land. This has the potential to generate electricity at a cost of PKR 14.8/kWh less compared to conventional means. Along with reducing the load of CD on the country's economy, this option gives a promising long-lasting solution as well.⁸

ii. Hydropower

Pakistan's hydropower sources account for an estimated capacity of about 50,000 MW. Out of such great potential, only 16% has been used so far. Furthermore, Pakistan has a widely spread canal system consisting of waterways and irrigation channels, which further increases the country's hydropower capacity.⁹

India and China use hydropower as one of the main sources of electricity generation. In 2012, India enhanced its hydropower capacity to 54,000 MW. Pakistan can also get 42,000 MW of power from water using the big rivers in the region between the Arabian Sea and the Mountains. Pakistan has benefited greatly from its geographic location.¹⁰

⁷ Rabia Liaquat et al., *Prospects of Renewable Energy in Pakistan to Meet INDC Commitments*. (Islamabad: US-Pakistan Center for Advanced Studies in Energy, National University of Sciences & Technology) <https://gcisc.org.pk/UnivCon/Prospects%20of%20Renewable%20Energy%20in%20Pakistan%20to%20Meet%20INDC%20Commitments-NUST.pdf>.

⁸ S. M. Shahzad, "Renewable Energy Resources in Pakistan: Paving a Way Forward," *Pakistan Journal of Science* 74, no. 4 (December 2022): 238–242.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366822426_RENEWABLE_ENERGY_RESOURCES_IN_PAKISTAN_PAVING_A_WAY_FORWARD

⁹ Rabia Liaquat et al., *Prospects of Renewable Energy*. 32.

¹⁰ Shahzad, "Renewable Energy Resources in Pakistan: Paving a Way Forward"

iii. Wind Energy

A report by the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2007 revealed that wind energy in Pakistan has the potential of around 346,000 MW, of which 120,000 MW is realistic. Using wind as raw material will ultimately lift the power sector by cutting import costs and producing cheaper electricity.¹¹

iv. Biomass Energy

The agriculture sector also has great potential for contributing to power generation. According to the World Bank, Pakistan has 26,280,000 hectares of under-cultivated land, with approximately 60% of its population associated with the agriculture sector. Agriculture residue, animal manure, municipal waste, and biofuels have a great capacity to contribute to the power sector.¹²

The amount of biomass produced in Pakistan is so large that it can potentially contribute 50,000 GWh annually. It accounts for 36% of the country's total energy needs. It is a single solution that simultaneously addresses the issues of waste management and cheaper power.¹³

4. Impacts of Renewable Energy

Solar, wind, hydro, and biomass energy could be cost-effective and easily available resources for power generation. It could also assist the sector to get rid of circular debt, in addition to having a favourable effect on the economy.

i. Compliance with SDGs

RE has the potential to help the country in fulfilling SDG 7 with the stress to “Ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable, and modern energy for all”. By using green techniques, it not only helps the nation meet its energy needs but also fights climate change. Additionally, it has the potential to reduce global warming and air pollution.¹⁴

ii. Lower load on the National grid

Due to Pakistan's abundance of solar, wind, water, and biomass resources, small power plants can use them to meet local energy needs without putting a strain on the existing national grid. The grid connection does not appear to be available in the near future in rural chunks of the

¹¹ Shahzad, “Renewable Energy Resources in Pakistan.”

¹² Rabia Liaquat et al., *Prospects of Renewable Energy*.

¹³ Shahzad, “Renewable Energy Resources in Pakistan”.

¹⁴ Rabia Liaquat et al., *Prospects of Renewable Energy*.

nation, particularly in the province of Balochistan, where settlements are widely spaced apart. In such a situation, water pumps, water heating and space heating solutions, and outdoor lights supported by solar power can electrify those areas with a comparatively small investment.

iii. **Decreased Reliance on Imports**

Reliance on natural resources can help Pakistan become more resilient to geopolitical shocks and crises. In the long term, this will result in the production of clean energy, the reduction of poverty, the creation of jobs, and inclusive economic progress.

iv. **Reduced load on the economy**

It is imperative to prioritise addressing the pressing problem of circular debt while creating financial budgets. Together with having positive effects on the economy and climate change, RE offers an incredible opportunity to eliminate persistent circular debt. The power sector's subsidies will ultimately shift to investments in inexpensive power alternatives and CD payments due to renewable energy options. Emissions reduction will lower air pollution, which will have a favourable direct effect on public health. Furthermore, it will lessen the financial burden dedicated to addressing air pollution and public health.

5. Obstacles to Renewable Energy Adoption

A number of barriers¹⁵ have been identified to impede Pakistan's efforts to shift to the generation of renewable energy. In addition, these factors play a part in the economy being increasingly burdened every day. To effectively embrace RE power generation solutions, these stumbling blocks require special attention.

i. **Subsidies**

Approximately 1% of GDP is allocated as subsidies in this sector. It is aimed at bridging the gap between the regulator and government-notified tariffs and clearing the circular debt stock. The primary objective behind these subsidies is to maintain the smooth operation of the existing

¹⁵ International Monetary Fund, *Pakistan: First Review Under the Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility, Requests for Modification of Performance Criteria and Request for an Arrangement under the Resilience and Sustainable Facility – Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Pakistan*, (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 17 May 2025)

power system. As a result, subsidies given to this industry play a significant role in slowing down the shift towards renewable energy sources.¹⁶

ii. Electricity theft

According to NEPRA, electricity theft and illegal electricity usage account for 3.9%. The total value of this power theft is PKR 53.4 billion.¹⁷ The Pakistani government subsequently fulfils this, which puts an increasing financial strain on them.

iii. Tariff Determination Problem

NEPRA has not identified a proper system for determining tariffs. Furthermore, government officials often lack the relevant qualifications. Due to this lack of expertise, they are unable to handle determining tariffs while taking into account the expenses related to each form of RE. This results in technological issues and capital investment costs loss, making this sector a more hesitant choice for investors.

iv. IPPs

Incentives that have been awarded to IPPs have affected both the financial condition and physical infrastructure of the country. The 1994 power policy ensured fuel supply, opulent pricing, and power purchasing, whether there was a need for it or not. The federal government is still obliged to pay 60% of IPPs' plants' capacity even if it's not willing to purchase power from them. Due to high tariff purchases from IPPs, this approach severely damaged the financial performance of WAPDA and KESC. The federal government is so mired in IPP payments and purchases that it is unable to make significant investments in RE.

v. Absence of strategy

Many policies have been established, but they often lack effective implementation. IPPs have been promised incentives, but regrettably, they are yet to receive the same. Circular debt is a great visible consequence of that. In this instance, the government overestimated the sector's supply and demand during the planning stage, which had detrimental effects. There is no supply and demand planning done beforehand. This resulted in unexpected shortages that were

¹⁶ Shahid Imran, Muhammad Imran Khan, and Zubair Ahmed, "Renewable Energy Potential in Pakistan and Barriers to Its Development for Overcoming Power Crisis," *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, (February 2021).

¹⁷ Shahid Imran et al., "Renewable Energy Potential in Pakistan and Barriers to Its Development for Overcoming Power Crisis," *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government* 27, no. 2 (2021): 6836–6846.

challenging to handle. When crucial decisions are being made, departments concerned and organisations are not considered, which eventually reduces the sector's efficiency and causes financial loss.

vi. Financial Constraints

Renewable energy needs a great investment for successful implementation and to produce positive outcomes. For example, wind power needs a great financial input to get started; hence, it cannot be afforded by local people. It puts greater responsibility on the government for launching and operating it through public-private partnerships.

6. The Way Forward

By 2030, it is anticipated that Pakistan will require 11,000 MW of electricity. Pakistan's current infrastructure cannot support that. The available studies¹⁸ have suggested numerous strategies to effectively incorporate RE into the power sector and support the transition of Pakistan from fossil fuels to RE.

i. Re-organizing Power Institutions

Adequate policymaking is desperately needed to integrate RE into the national grid. Relevant government organisations, such as the Pakistan Council of Renewable Energy Technologies (PCRET) and the Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB), should have a shared power of decision-making under policy. In addition to encouraging accountability in the industry, coordination and information exchange across these agencies will boost efficiency.

Except for distribution and generation businesses, over 20 organisations are actively involved in the power industry. Several organisations perform similar tasks.¹⁹ The existence of several

¹⁸ International Monetary Fund, *Pakistan: First Review Under the Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility, Requests for Modification of Performance Criteria and Request for an Arrangement under the Resilience and Sustainable Facility – Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Pakistan*, (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 17 May 2025)

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¹⁹ Tahir Basharat Cheema, Nadeem Ul Haque, and Afia Malik, eds., *Power Sector: An Enigma with No Easy Solution* (Islamabad: Research for Social Transformation & Advancement, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2022). <https://rasta.pide.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/PowerSector.pdf>

institutions is not only questionable but also demands immediate reforms. Moreover, DISCOs are legally separate corporate organisations. No additional organisation is required to oversee any of their activities. All business operations and decisions are entirely the responsibility of the company's board and management.

The only way to improve the efficiency of the energy sector is to dismantle these organizations and combine the ones that remain. Most appropriate option is the creation of independent power commission by combining the organizations which work on similar areas.

ii. Controlling electricity theft

The electricity theft ratio is different for different geographical regions across the country. This necessitates a focused strategy to identify and deal with electricity theft. Accountability needs to be established at the feeder level and region-specific through modern technology and techniques. By comparing the total energy dispatched through a feeder with the sum of all individual consumer bills on that line, DISCOs can not only detect theft but also take necessary measures to prevent it from recurring. Furthermore, incentives to public for identifying electricity theft will motivate them to deeply analyse their surroundings and become a support for government.

iii. Completing ongoing RE projects

Almost 800 locations, accounting for a capacity of 60 GW, have been identified in the Indus basin. Kalabagh (3,600-3,800 MW), Bhasha (4,500-4,600 MW), Bunji (5,400 MW), Dasu (3,800 MW), Kohala (1,100 MW), Patan (2,800 MW), Thakot (2,800 MW), Munda (750 MW), and Ahori (600 MW) dams are also in progress. Only if these projects are completed, they have the potential to fulfil the great energy demand of Pakistan in an economical and sustainable manner. In furtherance of this, there are numerous small-scale hydropower projects. Up to 1000 MW of hydroelectric electricity can be generated by these.²⁰

iv. Renegotiation of IPP Contracts

Certain provisions in the IPP contracts led to financial stress in power sector. These are also one of the main causes of why Pakistan is not able to prioritize investment in Renewable Energy.

²⁰ Shahzad, "Renewable Energy Resources in Pakistan".238–242.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366822426_RENEWABLE_ENERGY_RESOURCES_IN_PAKISTAN_PAVING_A_WAY_FORWARD

Furthermore, currently, the financial pressure of this sector is being borne either by the public or by the government of Pakistan, which exacerbates the situation.

Consequently, it is essential to revise the IPP contracts and align them with the public interest in order to make the power industry truly effective and beneficial to the general public. These contracts clearly demonstrate that excessive guarantees to investors can lead to long-term financial fragility. This calls for a review and update of the risk-sharing mechanisms of the contracts. These must reflect the current state of the nation's economy, requirements, and public interest. Clear guidelines need to be established through standardized contracts to ensure transparency and accountability.

v. Improved Tariff Determination

The managerial staff or board of directors of state-owned companies should be hired on merit. They must be experienced professionals in their domain. Experts in renewable energy should be employed to expedite the transition from conventional energy to renewable energy. These experts will assist in figuring out the appropriate tariff for each type of renewable energy.

Moreover, the current tariffs must be re-evaluated with the goal of providing the industry with fair consumer pricing and financial stability. Pre-paid and Post-paid smart metres can aid in the bill collection. It will aid in accurately reflecting the sector's supply and demand, in addition to promoting transparency.

vi. Feed-in Tariffs (FITs)

A feed-in tariff (FIT) is a policy adopted by the government to promote the use of renewable energy by ensuring that producers, whether domestic or commercial can sell the electricity they produce into the grid at a fixed price for a specified number of years. The years depend upon the contract for commercial or the type of licence in the case of domestic producers.

When the government buys electricity from the public, it not only lessens the burden of the national grid but also incentivizes people to contribute to the integration of RE in the national grid. Generally, at the initial stages, renewable technologies are costlier and less common. Hence, governments tend to begin with higher FIT rates in order to attract initial investment. After sufficient capacity is in place and technology prices begin to decline, FIT rates are cut back for new projects gradually.

This gradual decline in FIT rates over time leads to efficiency improvements to cut production costs and further investment in the sector. As FITs are shared by all users, the government doesn't have to pay entirely. It is an immediate necessity and cost-effective solution for Pakistan, which would result in a significant rise in the production of renewable electricity.

vii. Efficient Governance

Decentralized decision-making can help in better operational and financial management. Appointments should be made strictly based on merit. A performance or exit provision should be included in the contracts of employees to enhance their productivity.

NEPRA needs to scrutinize its rules and regulations and hold businesses responsible for their choices. In addition, the authority must deal with problems like load-shedding and overbilling and impose fines for noncompliance. To guarantee efficiency in the power sector, its primary goal should be to increase accountability and transparency. Apart from it, surveys that gather public opinions about the current energy system and recommendations for enhancements can help provide the proper guidance for transforming the energy industry and enhancing its outputs.

viii. Strategic Planning

There's a great need for preplanning the future supply and demand of the sector, so that relevant projects may be completed before the expected shortfall occurs. AEDB (Alternative Energy Development Board) and PCRET (Pakistan Council of Renewable Energy Technologies) are two key organizations in Pakistan working to promote and develop renewable energy sources. Both organizations are required to work together with the aim to achieve the common goal of promoting renewable energy by raising awareness about it. Introduction of an installation plan for household electrification setup can lead to a decrease in load on the grid while promoting RE. Moreover, to guarantee the success of RE integrations in the national grid, concurrent planning, including all relevant departments and organisations, is required.

ix. Public- Private Partnership

The private sector, in addition to the government sector, must be engaged to operate in power distribution and transmission networks. For better management, the government should either privatise DISCOs or grant contracts to private businesses to run them. This will reduce electricity theft, in addition to increasing the bill collection ratio.

Privatization also has the potential to attract investment and modernize infrastructure to maintain competition in the market. Increased competition among companies will also lead to lower prices and better services. It will enhance efficiency, along with saving government funds from being spent on subsidies. Consequently, it will improve both service quality and customer reliability.

x. Decreasing Subsidies

In order to redirect investment towards renewable energy sources, subsidies provided to this sector must be reduced. Ultimately, this diversion will raise the proportion of renewable energy in electricity generation.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan urgently needs a transition towards renewable energy for power production. Despite having a wealth of natural resources, the chronic circular debt dilemma continues to impede this transition. Furthermore, institutional flaws and rigid IPP contracts prevent the full potential of solar, wind, and hydropower from being utilized. Besides, political instability, improper subsidies, excessive reliance on imported fossil fuels, and lack of planning have increased financial strain and discouraged investment in sustainable energy.

This issue needs a sustained political will, transparent policymaking, and a long-term vision instead of short-term planning. Strategic reforms aimed at the integration of renewables and financial efficiency are crucial for gaining energy security, economic stability, and long-term sustainability. If that is done, Pakistan can eventually get rid of the immense financial stress caused by decades-old power generation methods as well as the cycle of circular debt.

A straightforward approach to address circular debt and boost the economy is through the incorporation of renewable energy. Pakistan's technical potential, geographic advantages and natural resources all help to ensure that. It lessens the country's reliance on fossil fuels. Ultimately, it strengthens Pakistan's resistance to fluctuations in global fuel prices. By providing cleaner and sustainable energy access, especially to rural regions where grid connectivity is either weak or not present, renewable energy helps Pakistan in attaining the SDGs.

Pakistan's dependence on renewable energy for power generation is not an impractical goal. Instead, it's achievable if proper strategies and steps are employed. The country already has all the prerequisites for this transformation. In addition to improving the nation's current state, this transformation will provide a stable and better future for future generations.



Celebrating 79th Independence Day of Pakistan – Aug, 11, 2026: Group photo of Youth leaders & delegates from universities across Pakistan at the Seminar on “Parliamentary Systems of Pakistan & the Role of PIPS in Inculcating Leadership”.



July 29, 2026: Two-day Training program “Legislative Journey of a Private Member’s Bill” for council officers/focal persons from Federal Ministries with Executive Director, PIPS



July 09, 2026: PIPS Team Research Roundtable Deliberation on Role of Legislatures for Right to Education with Delegates of Thar Education Alliance.



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