**Navigating the Cosmos**

**Multilateral cooperation in the space sector can offer several benefits to Pakistan in addressing its historical limitations.**

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in today’s day and age, the world is encountering an era of space renaissance. Groundbreaking ad­vancements in technology are driv­ing new capabilities, offering the limitless potential for progress, innovation, and sustainable development. In this respect, Pakistan launched its inaugural National Space Policy in December 2023, represent­ing a significant breakthrough for the country. It exemplifies Paki­stan’s resolve and commitment to le­verage space-based assets and tech­nology to deal with various societal needs and challenges. The compre­hensive policy covers civil, commer­cial, and national security aspects of space activities, aligning with na­tional vision and Sustainable Devel­opment Goals (SDGs). As Pakistan joins the ranks of nations venturing into space exploration, its inaugural space policy signifies a groundbreak­ing advancement. However, trans­forming the policy’s vision into re­ality necessitates concerted efforts, strategic planning, and collaborative action from all stakeholders.

[Ramazan: The month of patience, compassion for all](https://www.nation.com.pk/18-Mar-2024/ramazan-the-month-of-patience-compassion-for-all)

Pakistan’s space programme, one of the earliest in the region, en­countered significant challenges de­spite the milestone achievement of launching the Rehbar-1 satellite in 1962. Economic, technical, and bu­reaucratic obstacles hindered its po­tential for advancement and growth. Primarily, the lack of adequate finan­cial capital and access to high-end technology posed a barrier to the state’s ability to engage in ambitious projects. Additionally, Pakistan’s space programme suffered from a lack of coordination and coherence among the institutions involved. The existence of public and private insti­tutions in their segregated capac­ities hampered collaboration and synergy within the space sector.

Further, due to varied govern­ment policies, funding for ongoing space projects has been uneven, which caused them to be shelved or delayed. For example, due to significant budget cuts to the Pak­istan Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPRCO) during General Zia-ul-Haq’s era, Pakistan could not afford to launch a communication satellite. Resul­tantly, the country was only able to launch an experimental satellite with merely a month-long life span.

[2 held for illegally issuing mobile phone SIMs](https://www.nation.com.pk/18-Mar-2024/2-held-for-illegally-issuing-mobile-phone-sims)

Overcoming historical challeng­es faced by Pakistan’s space ambi­tions, the new space policy marks a transformative change. A signifi­cant component of the policy is that it acknowledges the importance of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in expanding the use of satellite ser­vices. By diverging from conven­tional dependence on government funding, Pakistan aims to leverage the strengths and expertise of both entities to enhance the accessibili­ty and affordability of satellite ser­vices. For example, the decision to allow international corporations, such as Starlink, to launch satellite communication services in Pakistan after acquiring NOC from the Minis­try of Defence is expected to address the estimated annual loss of US$40 million attributed to the upregu­lated space sector. Additionally, by contributing contribute 6 percent of its income to the government’s Research and Development (R&D) Fund, the private sector can support SUPARCO in attaining its objectives of advancing space research and de­velopment initiatives.

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The policy also highlights Paki­stan’s dedication to developing a self-sustaining and commercially vi­able space industry by collaborating with domestic industries. By pro­moting indigenisation and leverag­ing commercial opportunities, Pak­istan aspires to reduce dependence on external entities for services and technologies related to satellite and market value-added space products to generate revenue.

Furthermore, to extend and broad­en the benefits of space, policy is re­ceptive to international collabora­tion. Multilateral cooperation in the space sector can offer several bene­fits to Pakistan in addressing its his­torical limitations. Through global collaboration, Pakistan can gain ac­cess to advanced space technologies, communication infrastructure, and expertise that may not be domesti­cally available. While the National Space Policy charts a roadmap for the development of Pakistan’s space sec­tor; the state is mandated to carry out several steps to augment its benefits.

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Firstly, Pakistan must compre­hensively utilise space applications across various sectors, such as ag­riculture, urban planning and man­agement, disaster monitoring, cryp­tosphere modelling, etc., for the socio-economic development of the country. For instance, satellite re­mote sensing and Geographic Infor­mation System (GIS) technologies can be leveraged for informed deci­sion-making, resource management, and sustainable development.

Secondly, at the domestic lev­el, Pakistan must leverage its hu­man resources efficiently to foster an enabling environment of inno­vation, education, and collabora­tion. This requires investing in ed­ucational programmes and training initiatives focused on space science and technology. Moreover, partner­ships between universities and re­search institutions, such as SUPAR­CO and Pakistan’s Air University, in space-related disciplines can help in grooming a skilled workforce. Fi­nally, mass media must play its role in educating the masses on space-related topics in a way that piques viewers’ interest.

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On an international level, Pakistan must be committed to supporting ef­forts aimed at ensuring equitable ac­cess to outer space for all states, and oppose militarisation and weapon­ization of outer space. Therefore, Pakistan must actively create leg­islation to govern space initiatives, including the incorporation of in­ternational provisions into domes­tic laws. Likewise, by instating reg­ulations covering satellite launches, space travel, and research and com­munication, Pakistan can attain in­ternational trust and credibility.

All things considered, Pakistan’s National Space Policy has enor­mous potential to alter the coun­try’s space industry, spur innova­tion, and significantly influence its transition to a digital economy. The policy is ready to turn challenges into opportunities and is a monu­ment of fortitude in the face of past setbacks. However, Pakistan must adopt a comprehensive and for­ward-thinking strategy, particular­ly in terms of its capacity to foresee and adjust to future developments.

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