

1. Country overview

1.1. Geography

Pakistan, situated in Southern Asia[20] north of the Arabian Sea, shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan to the west, China to the northeast, and India to the east.[21] The country is characterised by diverse landscapes, ranging from mountainous areas to lowlands and arid deserts.[22] Pakistan's total area of roughly 796 100 square kilometres[23] can be divided into three main geographic zones: the highlands in the north, the Balochistan Plateau in the southwest, and the Indus river plain across central and eastern Pakistan.[24] The Indus river system constitutes Pakistan's primary water lifeline, providing most of its renewable freshwater and sustaining the great majority of the population living in the Indus Basin. It supports the economy by irrigating more than 90 % of crops and is vital to energy security, as all of Pakistan's hydropower facilities are situated within the Indus Basin,[25] but is increasingly influenced by climate change.[26] Pakistan ranks among the states most exposed to climate impacts, confronting intensifying extremes – such as exceptionally heavy monsoon rains and faster Himalayan–Karakoram glacier melt that increases river flows and flash flooding.[27]

Pakistan possesses significant natural gas and limited petroleum reserves;[28] however, domestic output does not satisfy the country's demand, making additional imports necessary.[29] Other natural resources include iron ore, copper ore, limestone and salt,[30] with the mineral sector described as having unused potential.[31] Major agricultural commodities in 2024/2025 comprised oil, cottonseed, meal, cotton, wheat, sugar, rice and millet.[32] Pakistan has also become one of the world's largest producers of opium poppies following a ban in neighbouring Afghanistan.[33]

Administratively, Pakistan is organised into four provinces, one federal territory and two administrative territories:[34] Punjab (in the east, capital Lahore and the province with the largest population), Sindh (in the southeast, capital Karachi), Balochistan (in the southwest, capital Quetta and Pakistan's largest province), and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, in the northwest, capital Peshawar and bordering Afghanistan); the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) is a federally administered area serving as the seat of government. In addition, there are the semi-autonomous regions of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB, in the north, bordering China, Afghanistan and India) and of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK, in the northeast, capital Muzaffarabad,[35] with its own president, prime minister and legislative assembly)[36]. GB and AJK form part of the contentious Kashmir region,[37] which has been contested between India and Pakistan for over six decades. The two nuclear powers have fought two wars and a limited conflict over the territory;[38] moreover, China controls part of the region.[39] Pakistan's four provinces are administratively subdivided into divisions, districts, and subdistricts (known as *tehsils*).[40]

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