

MEDIA COVERAGE



URAAAN PAKISTAN

GROWTH THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

38TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING &
CONFERENCE OF THE PSDE



APRIL 15-17, 2025

 MARRIOTT HOTEL, ISLAMABAD

 www.pide.org.pk

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WEB Editions

The News

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DAY 01

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DAY 02

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INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

April 11, 2025

Development journey from chimney to digitisation

Rasheed Khalid

Islamabad

As the digital era reshapes economies around the globe, Pakistan is envisioning a new growth trajectory built on innovation, inclusion and digital empowerment.

This vision takes center stage at the 38th Annual Conference of Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), organized by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), situated in Quaid-i-Azam University, under the theme "URAAN Pakistan: growth through digital transformation."

Scheduled here from April 15 to 17, the conference will bring together economists, technologists, policymakers and global thought leaders to explore how Pakistan can harness

digital transformation to unlock human potential, increase productivity and set course toward a trillion-dollar economy by 2035.

Rooted in a vision of reform and innovation, the conference builds on Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. Speaking on the urgency of the moment, Dr Nadeem Javaid, Vice-Chancellor of PIDE and President, PSDE, emphasised that Pakistan stands at a critical inflection point. "Once, the symbol of progress was the rising chimney of a factory. Today, it's a glowing screen in the palm of a dreamer. With just a smartphone, a data signal and an idea, the world opens up — and so does Pakistan's future," he said. "Digital transformation is no longer a choice — it's the runway from where Pakistan must

take off. URAAN Pakistan is our call to lift off — to imagine a country where a coder in Gilgit, an entrepreneur in Layyah and a data scientist in Karachi aren't working in silos, but shaping the same digital destiny. At the 38th PSDE Conference, we are not just exploring digital tools. We are charting a bold new development story — one that begins with connectivity and ends with opportunity for all."

Key highlights of PSDE 38 include keynote addresses from three globally renowned speakers—Nobel Laureates Michael Spence, Pier Paolo Saviotti and Muhammad J. Sear — whose insights will lend international perspective to Pakistan's digital ambitions. Over three days, the event will host six high-level panel discussions featuring both national

and international leaders, along with the presentation of 45 technical papers addressing critical areas of digital development, economics, and inclusive policy design.

According to a statement, the conference is structured around three main objectives. First, accelerating digital transformation by exploring policies to digitise governance, enable smart infrastructure and grow Pakistan's digital economy. Second, adapting global insights to the local context, particularly in areas such as AI-based innovation, digital public goods and data governance. Finally, the conference places a strong emphasis on inclusive growth, advocating for youth, women and underserved communities to be at the core of Pakistan's digital future — ensuring no one is left behind.

With the URAAN agenda gaining national momentum, the PSDE 38 conference is not just a forum for ideas but a platform for mobilising real, actionable change, adds the statement.

PSDE 38 Sets the Stage for Pakistan's digital takeoff

ISLAMABAD APR 10 (DNA) — As the digital era reshapes economies around the globe, Pakistan is envisioning a new growth trajectory built on innovation, inclusion, and digital empowerment. This vision takes center stage at the 38th Annual Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), under the bold theme "URAAN Pakistan: Growth Through Digital Transformation."

Scheduled from April 15 to 17, 2025, at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, the conference will bring together economists, technologists, policymakers, and global thought leaders to explore how Pakistan can harness digital transformation to unlock human potential, increase productivity, and set course toward a trillion-dollar economy by 2035.

Rooted in a vision of reform and innovation, the conference builds on the continued efforts of Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. His leadership has been instrumental in championing digital inclusion, knowledge-driven development, and institutional reform—principles that now form the backbone of the URAAN framework.

Speaking on the urgency of the moment, Dr. Nadeem Javaid, Vice Chancellor of

PIDE and President of PSDE, emphasized that Pakistan stands at a critical inflection point. "Once, the symbol of progress was the rising chimney of a factory. Today, it's a glowing screen in the palm of a dreamer. With just a smartphone, a data signal, and an idea, the world opens up—and so does Pakistan's future," he said. "Digital transformation is no longer a choice—it's the runway from where Pakistan must take off."

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April 11, 2025

URAAN PAKISTAN Growth through digital transformation' starts from April 15

A three-day annual conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) titled "URAAN Pakistan: Growth Through Digital Transformation," would commence here on April 15 (Tuesday). "As the digital era reshapes economies around the globe, Pakistan is envisioning a new growth trajectory built on innovation, inclusion and digital empowerment. This vision takes center stage at the conference," PIDE said in a news release.

The 38th conference would bring together economists, technologists, policymakers, and global thought leaders to explore how Pakistan can harness digital transformation to unlock human potential, increase productivity and set course toward a trillion-dollar economy by 2035.

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THE NATION

April 14, 2025

PSDE's 3-day seminar "URAAN Pakistan: Growth Through Digital Transformation" to begin tomorrow

APP
ISLAMABAD

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Speaking on the urgency of the moment, PIDE Vice Chancellor of PIDE and President of PSDE Dr Nadeem Javaid emphasized that Pakistan stood at a critical inflection point. "Once, the symbol of progress was the rising chimney of a factory. Today, it's a glowing screen in the palm of a dreamer. With just a smartphone, a data signal, and an idea, the world opens up, and so does Pakistan's future," he said. "Digital transformation is no longer a choice, it's the runway from where Pakistan must take off. URAAN Pakistan is our call to lift off, to imagine a country where a coder in Gilgit, an entrepreneur in Layyah, and a data scientist in Karachi aren't working in silos, but shaping the same digital destiny.

At the 38th PSDE Conference, we are not just exploring digital tools. We are charting a bold new development story, one that begins with connectivity and ends with opportunity for all," Nadeem said. Key highlights of the conference include keynote addresses from three globally renowned speakers, Nobel Laureates Michael Spence, Pier Paolo Saviotti and Muhammad J. Sear, whose insights would lend international perspective to Pakistan's digital ambitions.

April 16, 2025

Export growth could take Pakistan to trillion-dollar milestone: Ahsan Iqbal

By Mehtab Haider

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal said that a few judges and generals hatched a conspiracy due to their romance with one political leader and used an axe to plough the seeds of political instability in 2016-17. He said that social media could be utilized for entertainment or watching movies but developing a national narrative could not be accomplished with that platform.

In his inaugural speech on the occasion of the 38th Annual General Meeting and Conference organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) here on Tuesday, Ahsan Iqbal said that Pakistan lagged among the regional countries mainly because of political instability and inconsistencies in policies. He said that India's Manmohan Singh had sought SROs of the Economic Reform Agenda executed by former PM Nawaz Sharif in 1991-92 from then minister Sartaj Aziz and turned around their economy but Nawaz Sharif's government was ousted.

He said that they devised a five-year plan just ahead of the 2018 election with the understanding that whoever came into power would implement it with fine-tuning of the document to align with their priorities, but from 2018 to 2022 the country was run without any plan.

Now the economists, he said, would have to play their role to guide the youth in the wake of increased polarization. "Let's not create despair but increase exports of Pakistani made ups," he said and added that Pakistan could be turned into a 'one trillion dollar economy'.

Nadeem Javaid counsels choosing curation over censorship, strategy over suspicion; ADB's Country Director suggests undertaking deregulation to unlock potential of economic digitalization; SBP Deputy governor highlights addressing quality of human resources, data security to unlock real potential

The federal minister laid a comprehensive transformation roadmap through the URAAN 5E Framework, focusing on Exports, Equity & Empowerment, E-Pakistan, Environment & Climate, and Energy & Infrastructure.

He emphasized that technology is a powerful equalizer and stressed the need for National Centres for Digital Innovation, long-term planning, and consistent policies to overcome structural instability.

"Pakistan is not a poor country but a poorly managed economy, so digitization offers a lot of opportunities to improve the business processes and boost productivity," the federal minister added.

Dr. Nadeem Javaid, President of PSDE and Vice Chancellor of PIDE, introduced his "Leapfrogging Ladder Theory," proposing a model for Pakistan to bypass conventional stages of development through the adoption of frontier technologies, institutional reinvention, youth-led innovation, and a strong absorptive capacity.

Stressing the urgency of a digital-first mindset, he stated, "We cannot shape the digital future with analogue instincts—Pakistan must choose curation over censorship, and strategy over suspicion." During the panel discussion titled "Unlocking Pakistan's Digital Potential—The Next 10 Years," whereby

Ms Emma Fan ADB's Country Director stated that Pakistan would have to fill the infrastructure gap and undertake deregulation to unlock the real potential of digitalization of the economy.

She pointed out that there were millions of out-of-school children so the whole eco-system needed to be developed to reap of dividends of technological advancement. She said that Special Economic Zones could be a model as China used it to expand its expertise. She also informed that the ADB was providing a \$125 million loan for digitalization of the FBR.

Ms Fatima Akhtar from Jazz said the excessive taxation was hampering the growth trajectory. She also asked for increasing smartphones and boosting the rollout of 4G technology before moving towards launching 5G.

Deputy Governor SBP Saleem Ullah said that the currency in circulation stood at Rs9.6 trillion and it is the target of the central bank to reduce it by 25 percent in the next five years.

He said that there were 60 million users of mobile wallets and it would be promoted in years to come.

The quality of human resources and the safety and security of the data were highlighted as major issues that need to be focused on to unlock the real potential of Pakistan.

Pakistan OBSERVER

April 16, 2025

Digitization offers opportunities to improve business processes: Ahsan

PSDE 38th Conference opens with urgent call for digital transformation and policy reform

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The 38th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), opened in Islamabad with a powerful message: Pakistan is not underdeveloped—it is under-managed.

Held in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), RASTA, and the CPEC Centre of Excellence, the conference is themed "URAAN Pakistan: Growth Through Digital Transformation"—a call to re-imagine development in the digital era.

In his keynote ad-

dress, Federal Minister for Planning and Chancellor of PIDE, Prof. Ahsan Iqbal, laid out a

the need for National Centres for Digital Innovation, long-term planning, and consist-

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Chancellor of PIDE, introduced his "Leapfrogging Ladder Theory," proposing a model for Pakistan to bypass conventional stages of development through the adoption of frontier technologies, institutional reinvention, youth-led innovation, and a strong absorptive capacity. Stressing the urgency of a digital-first mindset, he stated, "We cannot shape the digital future with analog instincts—Pakistan must choose curation over censorship, and strategy over suspicion."

Mr. Awais Manzoor Sumra, Federal Secretary of MoPD&SI, described URAAN Pakistan as a strategic blueprint to achieve a \$1 trillion economy by 2035. He reaffirmed the centrality of the 5Es framework to digital-first governance and urged policymakers to implement real policy shifts to build a more inclusive, technology-driven Pakistan.

Ahsan calls for highlighting role of supportive ecosystem for national uplift

Under the current government, he said, URAAN Pakistan was launched as a comprehensive national vision to drive economic, social and digital transformation. "It is more than a metaphor for flight – it is a declaration that Pakistan is ready to take off into a new era of opportunity and innovation."

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Tuesday urged leading economists to identify the factors that have repeatedly derailed Pakistan from its development trajectory, highlighting the crucial role of a supportive ecosystem in achieving sustainable national growth.

"The seed of development cannot flourish without an enabling environment – one rooted in peace and harmony, long-term political stability, policy consistency and continuous reform. These are the pillars that successful nations have embraced to reach developed status," he said. The minister was addressing the inaugural session of the three-day annual conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), under the theme: "URAAN Pakistan: Growth Through Digital



Transformation." He said the conference reflected a shared national vision to embrace innovation, technology, and strategic planning as tools for inclusive and sustainable progress. "URAAN Pakistan is not just a slogan. It is our commitment to break the cycle of low growth, low productivity, and low ambition." Under the current government, he said,

URAAN Pakistan was launched as a comprehensive national vision to drive economic, social and digital transformation. "It is more than a metaphor for flight – it is a declaration that Pakistan is ready to take off into a new era of opportunity and innovation." Ahsan Iqbal said that Pakistan was not underdeveloped but "undermanaged," and the time

had come to put the country on the course its people rightly deserved. He highlighted the critical role of economists in shaping development strategies, describing economics as "the queen of the social sciences" that enabled societies to make informed decisions about the use and allocation of scarce resources. Highlighting the export-driven

orientation of URAAN Pakistan, the minister said the initiative opened new avenues for policy-backed trade facilitation, industrial accreditation and regional connectivity. "No country can grow sustainably without increasing its foreign exchange earnings," he noted. Through sectoral export strategies, enhanced participation in global

trade fairs, and support for manufacturers accessing international markets, the government aims to raise exports to over \$60 billion by 2029 – a goal Ahsan Iqbal called achievable and essential for sustained growth. "Pakistan has long relied on consumption and imports. Now is the time to shift towards growth driven by exports," he stressed. He stressed that growth must be inclusive, ensuring equity and poverty alleviation through job creation and youth development. URAAN Pakistan, he said, prioritizes skills training and workforce development to meet the demands of an evolving industrial landscape. "Nations that embrace technology leapfrog stages of development. Those that resist are left behind. Digitalization is not just about apps and portals – it's about dismantling red tape and building responsive, intelligent systems," he remarked. Ahsan Iqbal described the emergence of "e-Pakistan" as a new pillar of the country's transformation strategy, focused on reimagining the national economic model through digital ecosystems in fintech, agritech, and greentech – all designed to generate jobs and attract investment.



April 17, 2025

Digital Transformation, AI, and Tax Reform Take Center Stage on Day 2 of PSDE's 38th Conference

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The second day of the 38th Annual Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), hosted by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), brought together renowned scholars, economists, policymakers, and development professionals from across Pakistan and abroad. Held in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF),

RASTA, CPEC Centre of Excellence, and the Bank of Punjab, the day focused on pressing national challenges including digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and fiscal sustainability. With expert insights and policy-focused dialogue, the conference continues to chart a bold course toward inclusive, tech-enabled economic development.

Professor Pier Paolo Saviotti of Utrecht University delivered the prestigious Allama Iqbal Lecture, presenting a powerful case for structural change in economic development. Using the TEVECON model, he argued that

while improving efficiency within existing sectors provides temporary gains, long-term growth depends on qualitative change through the creation of new sectors and diversified output. He described this phenomenon as "creative destruction," where the economy continuously regenerates itself through the emergence of new industries.

In the Quaid-e-Azam Lecture, Nobel Laureate Professor Michael Spence presented "Digital Transformations, AI, Productivity, and the Future of Work: A Conversation for Pakistan." He explored the global AI landscape, stating

that AI is a transformative force fundamentally altering productivity and labor markets. Dr. Khalid Hafeez and Dr. Huma Baqai, as discussants, noted the unequal global distribution of AI benefits and stressed the importance of national readiness. Chairing the session, Dr. Eatza Ahmed concluded that technological literacy and social learning are now as important as reading and writing in building a modern economy.

The second panel session of the day addressed one of Pakistan's most critical issues: tax reform and public trust. Titled



"Charting Pakistan's Fiscal Trajectory: Enhancing Transparency & Trust," the panel brought together experts including Dr. Hamid Ateeq Sarwar (FBR), Dr. Mahmood Khalid (PIDE), Mr. Tobias Haque (World Bank), Dr.

Ali Salman (PRIME Institute), Ms. Hina Usmani (Usmani & Co.), and Dr. Ikram Ul Haq (Legal Tax Expert), moderated by Mr. Nasruminallah Mian (ADB). Further discussions addressed the evolving role of AI in academic

research. While generative AI boosts research productivity, ethical concerns were raised, prompting calls for training on responsible use, light-touch institutional regulation, and curriculum integration.

Digital transformation, tax reform take center stage at PSDE's moot

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

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(PPAF), RASTA, CPEC Centre of Excellence, and the Bank of Punjab, the day focused on pressing national challenges including digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and fiscal sustainability. With expert insights and policy-focused dialogue, the conference continues to chart a bold course toward inclusive, tech-enabled economic development. Professor Pier Paolo Saviotti of Utrecht University delivered the prestigious Allama Iqbal Lecture, presenting a powerful case for structural change in economic development. Using the TEVECON model, he argued that while improving efficiency within

existing sectors provides temporary gains, long-term growth depends on qualitative change through the creation of new sectors and diversified output. He described this phenomenon as "creative destruction," where the economy continuously regenerates itself through the emergence of new industries. Saviotti emphasized the need for a strong institutional framework to enable these transformations and stressed that economic development is a bi-causal process—both driven by and driving structural change. Discussants Dr. Adnan Rafiq and Dr. Idrees Khawaja reinforced this perspective,

highlighting the importance of innovation, ecosystem development, and public service delivery to sustain growth. Chairing the session, Dr. Safdar Sohail urged policymakers to go beyond efficiency and pursue sectoral reinvention as a strategic imperative. In the Quaid-e-Azam Lecture, Nobel Laureate Professor Michael Spence presented "Digital Transformations, AI, Productivity, and the Future of Work: A Conversation for Pakistan." He explored the global AI landscape, stating that AI is a transformative force fundamentally altering productivity and labor markets.

April 18, 2025

PSDE conference calls for smart governance

Rasheed Khalid

Islamabad

The 38th Annual General Meeting and Conference of Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE) concluded here wrapping up three days of dynamic discussions, presentations, and policy dialogues.

Organised by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in collaboration with Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Research for Social Transformation and Advancement (RASTA), CPEC Centre of Excellence and the Bank of Punjab.

In the final day, Senator Ishaq Dar, Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasised the pivotal role of provincial

governments in shaping Pakistan's digital future. Drawing from his involvement in the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the 2009 NFC Award, Senator Dar highlighted the need for provinces to demonstrate tangible results now that they hold greater autonomy and fiscal resources. He stressed the importance of digitisation at the grassroots level, advocating for smart schools, e-governance and real-time data systems as essential tools for national development. He called for innovation to be led by provinces, citing examples such as digital agriculture in KP, education reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan and climate resilience in Sindh.

Earlier, Mohammad J Sear, EY MENA's Digital Government & Public Sector Leader, in his Mahbubul Haq Memorial Lecture chal-

lenged traditional definitions of state power in an increasingly digitised world. He argued that in the modern era, sovereignty includes control over data, digital infrastructure and cyber platforms.

Rana Ihsaan Afzal Khan, Coordinator to the Prime Minister, echoed these sentiments and described data as "the new oil." He updated the audience on legislative efforts to enable a cashless economy and promote national data governance.

The discussions revealed key insights into the challenges and opportunities Pakistan faces in its digital transition. Despite limitations, there is growing momentum across sectors and provinces toward embracing technology as a driver of growth, inclusion, and resilience, the discussants observed.

April 18, 2025

PSDE Conference Calls for Smart Governance and Bold Innovation

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The 38th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE) concluded today in Islamabad, wrapping up three days of dynamic discussions, presentations, and policy dialogues. Hosted by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Research for Social Transformation and Advancement (RASTA), CPEC Centre of Excellence, and the Bank of Punjab, the conference brought together a diverse range of scholars, policymakers, economists, and development professionals from across Pakistan and the international community.

The final day featured a high-level keynote panel on "Smart Provinces for a Smarter Pakistan," where the Guest of Honour, Hon. Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime



Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the pivotal role of provincial governments in shaping Pakistan's digital future. Drawing from

his involvement in the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the 2009 NFC Award, Senator Dar highlighted the need for provinces to demonstrate

tangible results now that they hold greater autonomy and fiscal resources. He stressed the importance of digitization at the grassroots level, advo-

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Also addressing the audience was Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Prof. Ahsan Iqbal, who congratulated PIDE for successfully hosting the conference. He stressed the importance of transforming research into action and urged that the conference's recommendations be synthesized into concrete, implementable policies. Prof. Iqbal encouraged provincial governments to assume active roles in the country's socio-economic development and emphasized the need to close the gap between "knowing and doing."

April 18, 2025

Pakistan's Digital Future Begins in the Provinces

■ DNA
ISLAMABAD

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Hosted by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Research for Social Transformation and Advancement (RASTA), CPEC Centre of Excellence, and the Bank of Punjab, the conference brought together a diverse range of scholars, policymakers, economists, and development professionals

from across Pakistan and the international community.

The final day featured a high-level keynote panel on "Smart Provinces for a Smarter Pakistan," where the Guest of Honour, Hon. Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the pivotal role of provincial governments in shaping Pakistan's digital future.

Drawing from his involvement in the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the 2009 NFC Award, Senator Dar highlighted the need for provinces to demonstrate tangible results now that they hold greater autonomy and fiscal resources. He stressed the importance of digitization at the grassroots level, advocating for smart schools, e-governance, and real-time data systems as essential tools for national development.

PSDE moot calls for smart governance and bold innovation

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Earlier in the day, the prestigious Mahbub Ul Haq Memorial Lecture was delivered by Mohammad J. Sear, EY MENA's Digital Government & Public Sector Leader. His lecture, titled "Rethinking Sovereignty in the Digital Age," challenged traditional definitions of state power in an increasingly digitized world. He argued that in the modern era, sovereignty includes control over data, digital infrastructure, and cyber platforms—areas where global tech giants often wield more power than states. Sear advocated for Pakistan to invest in sovereign digital ecosystems and AI development to safeguard its autonomy and economic future. Chairing the session, Mr. Rana Ishaan Afzal Khan, Coordinator to the Prime Minister, echoed these sentiments and described data as "the new oil." He updated the audience on legislative efforts to enable a cashless economy and promote national data governance. A major highlight of the day was a panel discussion on "CPEC 2.0: Digital Leap – Learning China's Transformation," moderated by Dr. M. Muzammil Zia. Experts including Prof. Yuan Li of Shandong University and Dr. Mahmood Khalid of PIDE emphasized the shift from infrastructure-led growth under CPEC 1.0 to innovation and knowledge exchange under CPEC 2.0. Prof. Li outlined China's successful model of using policy-driven innovation to transform its economy and encouraged similar steps in Pakistan. Dr. Manzoor Ahmad advocated for digitalizing Pakistan's economy to empower SMEs and boost competitiveness. Mr. Ahmed Masud from Huawei highlighted the success of Huawei's Islamabad-based global resource center and advocated for deeper Pakistan-China digital collaboration. Other panelists, including Dr. Hassan Waqar of NUST, stressed the need for policy consistency and strong educational governance to achieve digital transformation. —DNA

April 18, 2025

Dar advocates NFC Award revisit

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Senator Ishaq Dar has stressed the need for revisiting the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award and phasing out overlapping federal bodies that contradict the spirit of devolution.

While addressing the final session of the 38th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), he said that as per the 18th constitutional amendment various federal bodies should be transferred to the provinces.

Dar highlighted the need for provinces to demonstrate tangible results now that they hold greater autonomy and fiscal resources. He said that provinces should take full responsibilities in health, education, social, policing and other sectors after the devolution.

He said that strengthening of federating units is inevitable for a strong federation, saying the provinces were given autonomy under the 18th constitutional amendment.

Dar said Pakistan is blessed with immense natural resources, with all provinces having unique strengths and potentials. He said these provincial strengths should be optimally utilised for the development of the country, adding the continuity of policies and political stability are necessary for development of the country.

The PSDE conference was organised by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Research for Social Transformation and Advancement (RASTA), CPEC Centre of Excellence, and the Bank of Punjab.

Dar emphasised the pivotal role of provincial governments in shaping Pakistan's digital future.

He stressed the importance of digitisation at the grass-

roots level.

Also addressing the audience was Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, who congratulated PIDE for successfully hosting the conference. He stressed the importance of transforming research into action and urged that the conference's recommendations be synthesised into concrete, implementable policies. Iqbal encouraged provincial governments to assume active roles in the country's socio-economic development and emphasised the need to close the gap between "knowing and doing."

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In the session on "Digital Disruption: Economic Readiness," chaired by Waqas Anwar researchers highlighted Pakistan's lag in digital infrastructure, education, and regulatory frameworks compared to regional peers. One study projected that comprehensive reforms in these areas could boost Pakistan's GDP growth by 1.8 percent annually by 2030. Other presentations emphasized the benefits of digital payments, the importance of financial literacy especially for women and rural users—and the need to build comprehensive knowledge ecosystems to reach Pakistan's trillion-dollar economic ambitions.

Another technical session on "E-Governance for Economic Growth," moderated by Dr Tallat Anwar, covered mobile banking adoption in Khushab, the potential of block-chain in Islamabad's real estate market, and the impact of legal frameworks on entrepreneurial ecosystems. The session emphasized tailored digital strategies for rural populations, regulatory reforms, and the need for enhanced international research collaborations.

In the "Digitalization and Industrial Transformation" session, scholars discussed the role of digital inclusion, particularly in underdeveloped regions like South Punjab. The session highlighted weak infrastructure, low digital literacy, and limited governance as key barriers, and called for region-specific policies supported by public-private collaboration.

Another session, "Trade and Commerce in the Digital Era," explored digital transformation's impact on trade facilitation, service exports, SME participation in e-commerce, and youth entrepreneurship. One study analyzed the impact of Pakistan's Fully Automated Clearance System (FCA) and called for more strategic upgrades. Another proposed a Digital Economy Development Index (DEDI) to track digital transformation.