



# ECONFEST 2024: FOSTERING ECONOMIC DISCOURSE AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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The third iteration of EconFest, organized by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), unfolded with enthusiasm at the scenic Gandhara Citizen Club, F9 Park, Islamabad. Spanning two days of intellectual vigor and communal fellowship, EconFest 2024 transcended mere dialogue to become a crucible of transformative ideas, inclusive engagement, and vibrant celebration. Although economics is often perceived as a dry and monotonous subject, EconFest made it engaging and relevant, capturing the attention and imagination of a diverse audience.

As our nation grapples with formidable economic challenges, paramount among them is the overhaul of the antiquated tax system—a vestige of the colonial era. This complex system, marred by inefficiencies, stifles revenue generation, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive economic reforms, which was the main theme at EconFest. Following Dr. Nadeem ul Haq's engaging session on "Islah: Beyond IMF," EconFest 2024 unfolded into a series of thought-provoking discussions led by distinguished speakers and experts in their respective fields.

Central to EconFest's ethos is its unwavering commitment to inclusivity. Attendees from diverse backgrounds, spanning academia, government, industry, and civil society, converged to deliberate on the multifaceted tapestry of Pakistan's economic landscape. Through panel discussions, keynote addresses, and dedicated sessions, the festival amplified the voices of young scholars and aspiring changemakers, providing them with a platform to articulate their vision for Pakistan's economic future.

The festival featured a series of discussions on topics of utmost importance for Pakistan's economic trajectory.

In one hall, attendees delved into the intricacies of public finance with the session titled "Where Do They Spend My Taxes?" Moderated by Athar Maqsood, the discussion featured insights from prominent figures including Mehmood Khalid. Together, they examined the allocation and utilization of public funds, shedding light on the priorities and challenges in Pakistan's fiscal landscape. Meanwhile, in another hall, the focus shifted to personal finance and investment strategies with the session "Building Wealth Through Investment." Led by industry experts and financial analysts, this discussion provided attendees with valuable insights into navigating the complexities of investment markets, managing risks, and harnessing opportunities for wealth creation in an evolving economic environment.

The overwhelming response from the audience was evident throughout the festival. The sessions were well-attended, with full houses in most discussions, reflecting the public's growing interest in economic issues and the festival's success in making these topics accessible and engaging.

Furthermore, sessions such as 'Documenting the Informal Economy,' led by luminaries like Shabbar Zaidi, shed light on strategies to formalize informal economic activities—a crucial step towards sustainable economic growth. Simultaneously, discussions on 'Next Generation: Law, Politics, and Bureaucracy' underscored the imperative of nurturing a new cadre of leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of governance and policymaking in the 21st century. Following a brief interlude, attendees immersed themselves in discussions on 'Education Without Career' and 'Revisiting Government Jobs,' delving into the evolving landscape of education and employment in Pakistan. Concurrently, experts elucidated essential steps for Pakistani compa

nies to compete globally and dissected geo-economic dynamics, shedding light on Pakistan's strategic positioning in the global economic landscape. The festival served as a melting pot of ideas, insights, and actionable strategies.

At the heart of EconFest lay a resounding emphasis on youth empowerment. The festival's agenda was meticulously curated to amplify the voices of young scholars and aspiring changemakers, underscoring their pivotal role in shaping Pakistan's economic trajectory. Panel discussions, keynote addresses, and interactive sessions served as avenues for youth to articulate their vision, aspirations, and concerns, ensuring their perspectives were not only heard but actively incorporated into the discourse on national economic development. It also served as a platform for revisiting critical issues from previous editions. As the third successive event, EconFest 2024 welcomed returning attendees who were inspired by the fruitful discussions of previous years. Their active participation underscored the enduring impact of EconFest in fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

The festival's success was not solely confined to intellectual pursuits. EconFest embraced the spirit of holistic engagement, offering attendees a plethora of recreational activities, including a fun zone, food stalls brimming with culinary delights, and an enchanting Qawali evening. These moments of respite provided opportunities for networking, relaxation, and cultural exchange, fostering a sense of community and companionship among participants.

As EconFest 2024 drew to a close, its impact reverberated far beyond the confines of the event venue. Attendees departed with enriched perspectives, renewed inspiration, and a deepened sense of solidarity, poised to translate the ideas and insights gleaned during the festival into tangible actions and initiatives.

EconFest's legacy as a catalyst for dialogue, collaboration, and youth empowerment endures, reaffirming its pivotal role in shaping the narrative of economic development in Pakistan. As we reflect on the successes of EconFest 2024, we look forward to the continued convergence of minds, ideas, and aspirations at future editions of this seminal event.

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*The author is a Research Assistant at RASTA.*