

Coherent Reforms will ensure Pakistan's Economic Future: Experts

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Pakistan must strengthen policy coherence, regulatory predictability, productive enterprise and human capital to move beyond repeated cycles of stabilisation towards sustainable, inclusive and investment-led growth. This assessment emerged at a roundtable titled “Pakistan’s Economic Outlook,” organised by the Centre for Law and Security (CLAS).

The roundtable was chaired by Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, President, CLAS, who delivered the concluding remarks.

It was moderated by renowned anchorperson Mr. Rehman Azhar, Executive Director, CLAS.

Representatives from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), the Policy Research Institute of Market Economy (PRIME), The Express Tribune and TMUC Pakistan, together with an international business leader and executive advisor, collectively assessed the reforms required to improve Pakistan’s long-term economic performance.

A key theme was Pakistan’s weakening long-term economic performance, reflected in declining productivity, persistently low savings and investment, and reduced industrial depth. Speakers also highlighted a narrow export base, recurring external-financing pressures and inadequate employment generation, and stressed domestic-resource mobilisation and stronger productive value chains.

Speakers also highlighted economic freedom, the rule of law, taxation, international trade and the state’s role in commercial activity. It was observed that government should establish and enforce clear rules rather than simultaneously regulate markets and operate businesses. Import restrictions introduced without regard to domestic producer’s input requirements could disrupt production and weaken exports.

The discussion further reflected on repeated dependence on IMF-supported programmes and competing economic-policy frameworks. Participants observed that Uraan Pakistan and other national initiatives required clear financing, costing, institutional ownership and implementation arrangements. External consultants could not substitute for domestic expertise and institutional capacity.

Institutional coordination was also identified as a significant requirement. Participants emphasised meaningful provincial and local involvement in policy design and implementation, noting that substantial development spending and service delivery occurred below the federal level. Regulatory stability, credible enforcement and clearly defined responsibilities were considered essential to investor confidence.

Participants underscored the importance of translating reform commitments into tangible economic outcomes. High electricity costs, unreliable supply, administrative discretion and recurring intervention in routine business activity constrained productive investment. Greater support for enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, was considered necessary for employment, innovation and sustained growth.

It was also noted that investor confidence depended on predictable rules governing investment approvals, security requirements, data governance, licensing, banking and dividend repatriation. Universities were encouraged to cultivate entrepreneurship, digital skills, leadership and stronger industry links so that graduates could become innovators and job creators.

The roundtable also considered the economic implications of changing regional and global conditions, including the U.S.-Iran conflict. Pakistan's ports and geographical position were identified as potential gateways to Central Asia, Russia, Türkiye and wider markets. CPEC 2.0, information technology, manufacturing, agricultural modernisation, critical minerals and the maritime economy were highlighted as areas of opportunity.

Contributions to the discussion were made by Dr. Shujaat Farooq, Professor of Economics and Dean (Research) at PIDE; Dr. Ali Salman, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of PRIME; Mr. Shahbaz Rana, Economic Correspondent at The Express Tribune; Mr. Tasadduq Gilani, an international business leader, executive advisor and professional trainer; Ms. Syeda Maureen Zaidi, Head of Laws at TMUC Pakistan; and Ms. Maryam Abrar, a higher-education professional associated with TMUC Pakistan.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan balanced the panel's economic reality check with positive trends in social mobility, higher education, human-capital development, digitisation and what he described as a robust private sector. He identified three broad sources of opportunity: Pakistan's natural and human potential; China; and investment and technology from the United States and Europe. He emphasised the need to develop professional capacity, use Pakistan's ports and geographical position effectively, and pursue national confidence grounded in realism.



