

# Looking forward to the Future of Pakistan conference

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*On Saturday, the first LSESU Future of Pakistan conference takes place in the New Academic Building. As the countdown to the event begins, President of the LSESU Pakistan Development Society **Omar Bhatti** introduces some of the key speakers and topics that will be discussed on Saturday.*

*Tickets for the conference are available [here](#). You can view the full schedule and speaker bios [here](#).*

The London School of Economics and Political Science is a hub of intellectually stimulating ideas, discussions and narratives, yet it has never seen a Pakistan-focused conference. The LSE and Pakistan share a deep connection which goes back to the early 20th century when LSE's founders Beatrice and Sidney Webb visited Lyallpur, Peshawar and Lahore. The strength of the relationship is today reflected by some of the major Pakistanis who have studied here including ambassadors and politicians such as Maliha Lodhi (Current Pakistani ambassador to the United Nations) and Khawaja Asif (Current Minister for Defence). The LSE Student Union (LSESU) Pakistan Society has also been active for decades and offers a wide range of cultural and entertainment events. But what has been missing?

We would argue there is a lack of debate on major issues faced by Pakistan today, and it is for this reason that the LSESU Pakistan Development Society was established last year. Its milestone event, the first ever student-run conference on Pakistan will take place this Saturday, 19 November. The [Future of Pakistan conference](#) provides the platform to ask questions and engage with a sitting minister, academics and policy makers on major economic, political and social issues. The aim is to have a constructive solution oriented discussion, and the intention is to produce a working paper summarising key policy suggestions after the event.

As the Pakistan Development Society's second president, I've been meeting speakers ahead of the conference to discuss their sessions. Summarised here are a selection of the discussions I've had to give a taster of the conversations that will take place on Saturday.

**Minister Ahsan Iqbal**, the mastermind behind China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), will be the keynote speaker at the conference. The minister will be discussing the CPEC project, which has been described as Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as "the most important economic initiative for South Asia in the 21st century". It is claimed that it will create at least a million jobs and by virtue of the Gwadar port, it will make Pakistan the gateway for trade with Gulf nations. This will translate into business growth and immense export opportunities. However, when I suggested that benefits will be reaped by the big businesses and industrial owners rather than the common man, Minister Iqbal was quick to respond that the job creation will benefit a significant number of individuals, including in the historically marginalised province of Balochistan. The Minister was also optimistic that the 'early harvest' project aimed at generating 10,400 Megawatts as part of the CPEC plan would boost the gross domestic product growth. There has been opposition to the program from the provincial assembly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and nationalist movements in Balochistan, but the Minister intends to underline that overall benefits which will trump reservations held by opposition to the program at the conference.

**Dr Adnan Khan** will appear on the Economics Panel at the conference. Hailing from Lahore, Dr Khan is a lecturer at LSE and is Research and Policy Director at International Growth Centre. He is keen the economic panel to debate real issues, for example around taxation in Pakistan, rather than getting bogged down into mudslinging.

Tax collection is often termed as the biggest problem in the country, with most estimates suggesting that less than one per cent of the population pay taxes. Dr Khan noted tax regulations have improved due to pressure on the government but still do not deal effectively with loopholes. The problem is worsened by the 70 different types of taxation administered by 37 government bodies. Dr Khan will be speaking on methods of effective tax collection and

incentives to get people to contribute their share.

**Nabeel Goheer** is a former international consultant for UNDP and USAID and current Director of Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, UK. He also has almost a decade's worth of experience in Pakistan's government, having served in several positions as in the Economic Affairs Division. In our meeting ahead of the conference, Mr Goheer discussed the divisions in Pakistan today, which are not just predicated on tribes and family ties in rural areas but on groupings which exist within bureaucracy. He argued the only way to become a nation will be to transcend these divides.

Mr Goheer will be discussing the key priorities for development in Pakistan on Saturday. The current government is often criticised for its lack of spending on education and health so he will be talking in detail about the need for an educational oriented budget as well as the pros and cons of the government's current development priorities. He is a personal favourite of the Pakistan Development Society for he has extended a lot of support despite his busy schedule.

Tickets are up on the conference page on [Facebook](#) and our [website](#) but spaces are limited, so get yours now! Students interested in getting more involved can also apply for our student panels – get in touch via Facebook if this appeals.

*View the full schedule, speaker bios and ticket details [here](#).*

### **About the Author**

**Omar Bhatti** is an undergraduate student at LSE, and President of the LSESU Pakistan Development Society.

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