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# Hosting International Conferences: A Catalyst for National Development!

## A-Introduction

Hosting international events prompts national development, driving economic growth, enhancing international relations and boosting the country's global image. These are beneficial both symbolically and strategically for progress of the country.

## B-An Overview of Hosting International Conferences, with special emphasis on recent SCO Summit in Islamabad

## C-How Hosting International Events Portrays affects the Outlook of the Country

- i) Promotes soft image of the country
- ii) Neutralises the speculations about security risks
- iii) Showcase the strategic importance of the country

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iv) A strong advocate of regional cooperation

## ~~D-How~~ National Development can be Ensured by Hosting International Conferences

i) Strengthening international relations

ii) Fulfilling geo-economic goals by trade deals with member nations

iii) Overcoming energy crisis with help of central asian states

iv) Benefiting from conference influence on developmental projects in Pakistan

v) Opportunities for foreign direct investment

vi) Robust to tourism industry of the country

vii) Counterterrorism cooperation with neighbouring states

## E - Measurements to be taken by Pakistan

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i) Strong diplomacy to be ensured in post-conference time

ii) ~~Efforts~~ Efforts to combat terrorism in country

iii) Control over political unrest in the country.

## F- Conclusion

International conferences are not mere events, they are engines of national development propelling countries towards a brighter future," says Mushahid Hussain Syed. In a world increasingly interconnected, hosting international conferences can be the key to unlock a nation's full potential. Such events are strategically very important, as they promote the positive image of the country. This can be visualised from the context of recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Islamabad. This event has emphasized Pakistan's global and regional importance. In the meantime, it has nullified the speculations about the weak security situations in the country. With the continuous occurrence of such conferences, national development of Pakistan can be ensured. It will fulfill the geoeconomic goals of the country by trade deals with the various member states. Chances of strengthening of international relations will be improved, especially with global powers. It provides with the

significant opportunities to secure foreign direct investment. Such events in future will further strengthened the country by employment opportunities and giving robust to tourism industry. Certain measurements are necessary to be taken by Pakistan to make sure the desired outcomes of the conference. Strong diplomacy is primary to be followed after the conference. Along with that, curb on non-state actors disturbing the peace in country is essential. This will help the country enjoy the true essence and benefits of hosting mega international events. Because hosting international events prompts national development, driving economic growth, enhancing international relations and boosting country's image. Hosting international events prove to be very crucial for the host country. Successful arrangements of these events ensure the country to be the host of upcoming events in future. Real-world examples of how hosting international events have transformed the

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Fate of the countries. Dubai hosts Dubai Expo, every year, a mega international event. This has contributed to Dubai's transformation as global trade and innovation hub. Qatar hosted FIFA world cup in 2022, which elevated its global profile and a boom to its economy. "Qatar's economy witnessed a record 8 percent growth in the aftermath of FIFA world cup 2022". This shows the importance of international events in progression of a country.

Hosting international conferences portray a positive outlook of the country in many ways. Mainly, it promotes the constructive and useful image of the country. International mega events attract the audience from all across the globe and have full-fledged media coverage.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit held on 16-17 October, 2024 in Islamabad, has been in limelight all over international media.

The meetup was topic of discussion in global arenas, because of the presence of delegations from various countries. This has ultimately given

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a special focus to Pakistan for hosting heads of governments of SCO members. Hence, by organising the successful event, Pakistan has been able to steal the spotlight.

Peaceful conclusion of the summit has neutralised all the security concerns regarding Pakistan. The portrayal of Pakistan as a failed security state by India, is widely adopted in international media. India has always tried to link Pakistan with terrorism. As Indian external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said; "Pakistan's GDP can only be measured in terms of radicalisation and exports in terrorism". This conference has negated all such speculations, and has widely propogated the message that, Pakistan is totally safe and viable for foreign delegations and international events. Pakistan has actively engaged with participating nations to assure them of their safety and security. All the member states have shown their confidence in the arrangements and have applauded the hospitality of Pakistani nation.

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Confidence of member states and participation of all has denied any supposition of security threats.

Pakistan's hosting of the summit was a significant milestone, showcasing the country's growing regional and global influence. Pakistan has hosted such kind of global event after many years. This conference has countered the narrative in build in previous few years about diplomatic isolation of Pakistan. It has visualised that Pakistan is an important country, not just in South Asia but at international level too.

As Maleeha Lodhi said; "It does, however, help to elevate Pakistan's diplomatic standing and show that it is an active player in multilateral forums".

Hence, having a grand meetup at home is being seen as diplomatic victory for Pakistan.

Successful taking place of the international events portray positive outlook of the country. This proves to be very beneficial for national development in many ways, as discussed below.



Hosting international conferences and active participation in regional and international organisations is helpful in strengthening international relations. Constructive and well built relations with other countries have become the need of hour. As prime minister Shabbaz Sharif said in his speech at SCO summit; "No nation could overcome today's challenges alone and no single country could harness the potential of tomorrow without support of others". Such conferences provide the opportunities to strengthen international relations, which in the long run are crucial for national development. Pakistan hosted delegates from ten SCO member states and sixteen dialogue partners. This gives Pakistan a wider room for building up global ties.

The more nourished the international relations, more chances for trade and economic opportunities. Pakistan is pursuing its geoeconomic goals and desires to enhance its trade and investment ties.

Pakistan can leverage SCO to expand its financial ties with countries like Russia, India and

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other member states, reducing its reliance on traditional markets.

A significant increase in trade has been witnessed with SCO member countries this year.

According to State Bank of Pakistan; "exports to 9 SCO countries rose by 32.04 percent to 3.07 billion dollars in FY-24 as compared to 2.32 billion dollars in FY-23".

The focus on regional and international connectivity through conferences can lead to trade facilitation and reduced barriers for Pakistani businesses.

Among all the trade deals, major focus should be on energy. Pakistan faced severe energy crisis, which has devastated its economy. It has affected industrial as well as domestic sector. Through the cooperation of these regional organisations Pakistan can pursue its desire for energy imports. SCO member countries especially Russia and central Asian states are rich in energy. Through the forum of SCO, Pakistan can engage with these member states in bilateral and multi-lateral trade deals. Energy-rich nations can invest in

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development of power plants, pipelines, and renewable energy projects in energy lacking countries like Pakistan. Thus, cooperation with member states can help solve Pakistan's energy crisis, which is one of the major hinderances to its development.

Moreover, the cooperation of regional states is influential on Belt and Road initiative. Although, it was proposed by China, but this initiative is game-changer for the whole global south. It has special importance for Pakistan, because Pakistan along with China launched China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is inaugural project of Belt and Road initiative. All the member states of SCO, except China and India, are advocate and participant of China's Belt and Road initiative. Pakistan is geographically located at such a point, that it can benefit via transit trade routes from these projects. Mutual cooperation of member states can make this project prosper. It is for the benefit of all. As Chinese president Xi Jinping said, "The Belt and Road Initiative is a public road open to all, not a

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private path owned by one single party" Pakistan can benefit from it more than anyone else. It <sup>can</sup> be helpful for Pakistan to revive its struggling economy. Pakistan economy is in very detrimental situation, and it needs investments from foreign sources. Regional organisations and their cooperation is essential for Pakistan to uplift its economy. Hosting mega events build up the confidence and interest of foreign investors. These events in continuous occurrence make sure first the security of the state and secondly the opportunities of significant payback for investors. Pakistani government is striving very hard to attract potential investors. Arranging According to State Bank of Pakistan, "Pakistan has actively pursued economic diplomacy and saw an  $\uparrow$  increase of 17 percent during fiscal year 2024". According to state media, foreign investment reached 1.9 billion dollar during fiscal year 2024 compared to 1.6 billion dollars in last fiscal year". Arranging international events and active participation in

regional and global organisations are quite helpful in attaining foreign direct investment.

Foreign investment and interest in tourism industry of Pakistan can be a game changer for country's economy. Home of two of world's ten highest mountains peaks and a coastline of about fourteen hundred kilometers, Pakistan

presents a mesmerising variety of natural wonders. Regional and global cooperation by developmental organisation can explore and elevate Pakistan's tourism industry. Security concerns and lack of infrastructural

developments have been the primary hinderance to progress of tourism industry of Pakistan. Occurrence of international conferences can help change the global narrative.

Progress in tourism industry, eventually results in superiority at global platforms. As Moonis Ahmer says;

"When a country is known for a culture of tourist hospitality, it means international recognition because of safe, hygienic and viable facilities for tourists". Robust to tourism industry is crucial for strategic and symbolic development of the country.

Holding mega events at home brings a lot of opportunities for countries to prosper. Real-world examples of UAE and Qatar are present in front of Pakistan. Pakistan has successfully hosted SCO summit, and is looking to host many such events in future. But Pakistan has to take certain measurements to comply with international standard of hosting and cooperation, which are as following.

Firstly, Pakistan has to ensure strong diplomacy in post-conference time. It needs to engage with all member states and follow upon all the agreements and MoUs signed. Pakistan should focus on the countries which participated in SCO summit, and had no prior strong diplomatic ties with Pakistan. Prime Ministers of Belarus and Mongolia was present in meeting. Pakistan had shown a trade interest with these countries, especially agricultural imports and joint tractor manufacturing projects with Belarus. Along with major players in league and region, Pakistan should also focus on developing ties

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with small member states. Cooperation and coordination with all member states is mandatory to work in unity. As Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif said, "Our collaboration joint teamwork and academic linkages across the SCO region— A reflection and commitment of our determination to promote prosperity through unity". Thus, a strong diplomatic approach is necessary for Pakistan to benefit from these conferences and organisations.

Secondly, concerted efforts are required to nip the evil of terrorism in the bud. Pakistan is one of the countries, who has faced a lot of setbacks due to terrorism at home. Terrorism has deteriorated Pakistan's diplomatic standing and its strategic stature. A recent deadly attack on a convoy of Chinese engineers in the port city of Karachi has once again put the spotlight on the poor security situation in the country. Clear security situations are a dire need for national development and hosting foreign delegates. Holding a summit was a challenge for Pakistan, ensuring the

Full-proof security to many international delegates. As Michael Kugelman, a South Asian expert said, "There was a lot at stake for Pakistan with this summit, given domestic imperatives around ensuring security and given the strategic importance of SCO itself". Hence, without ensuring security, occurrence of global events and eventually the national development are not possible.

Lastly, the political unrest in the country, is also a dilemma. Political conflicts give rise to social unrest which affect the law and order situation. In the days of SCO summit, curfew was imposed in Islamabad, Mobile service was disrupted and thousands of security personnel was deployed. Political issues propagate the message of national disunity to the whole world. In the recent conference, despite authorities pulled out all the stops to prevent untoward incidents, Pakistan domestic concerns <sup>we</sup> are likely to dominate the sidelines of the summit. Political protestors wanted to



hold the protests during the summit, and made the government look bad. Thus, such political conflicts are detrimental to national unity and progress, so they must be countered.

Conclusively, one may say that hosting international conferences is essential for national development, because it prompts economic growth and strengthens international relations.

Arranging such events at home portrays the positive image of the country, showcase its strategic importance and negates the speculations of security risks. Such conferences at home ensure national development by elevating diplomatic standing of the country and fulfilling its geoeconomic goals. Such conferences help in confidence building and influence the ongoing developmental projects in the country.

They provide with significant opportunities of foreign direct investment and a robust to tourism industry. But this all is difficult to achieve, especially in case of

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Pakistan. It needs concerted efforts to have control on its political and security issues. A strong diplomacy is demanded from Pakistan to help benefit from these organisations.