



Press Release

## **Punjab Cabinet Approves First ever “Punjab IT Policy 2018” UMAR SAIF HIGHLIGHTS SALIENT FEATURES**

Lahore, May 31, 2018

The Province of the Punjab’s first ever IT Policy 2018 premised upon five pillars include support to the industry, bridging the digital divide, e-governance, citizen centric services and entrepreneurship was approved by the Provincial Cabinet in its last meeting yesterday, which is focused to bridge the digital divide across gender, region and economic classes and achieve accessible and affordable access for all and to position Punjab as the IT R&D and innovation hub of Pakistan. With this approval the Punjab has now become the first province to launch its IT Policy.

Elucidating the salient features of the policy document Dr. Umar Saif founder Vice Chancellor of ITU, the Punjab and the Chairman Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) informed a group of media persons who called on him here today and said that it proved government’s commitment to use ICT as an enabling tools for improving governance, efficiency, transparency and accountability. The policy document consolidates all initiatives taken in the sector and also sets a future roadmap that will take the province to its ultimate destination which is making Punjab the Hub of Information Technology.

He said that it would establish Punjab as the preferred destination for local and international investment in the IT/ITES/EHM industries, enable the entrepreneurial ecosystem to flourish in the field of IT/ITES/EHM, increase financial inclusion and incentives investment in innovative ICT technologies to promote e-commerce in the province, create an enabling environment for IT Technologies and their safe usage through policy reform and improvements in legal framework, use ICTs for enhancing the capabilities of citizens and setting forward a more inclusive and broader human development agenda, to endeavor for rapid expansion and growth of the knowledge based economy in the province, strengthen and build human resource and increase employment opportunities through the use of ICTs and to utilize ICT for a more efficient transparent and green governance model in Punjab.

The Punjab’s IT Policy 2018 would attract long-term investments, improve export remittances and increase new IT parks through technology SEZs throughout the country, he stated. Being one of the main pillars of this policy, Government of Punjab has laid great emphasis on it and has extensively used technology in improving efficiency and governance across several sectors.

While presenting the policy document before the cabinet, Dr. Umar Saif, Chairman Punjab IT Board informed the cabinet that the process of the policy formulation started one and half year back and during its formulation stage it was ensured that the process was inclusive, outward looking, joined-up and evidence based so that a well-rounded effective policy document could be produced. To maintain highest standards of input, several focus group discussions and individual consultation sessions were conducted along with rigorous in-house research. More than 150 individuals from across all key sectors have provided input in this document. The policy was also opened for public comments for two months, he informed.

The specific policy commitments in this regard are: establishment of common resource and service centers and public Wi-fi hotspots in remote areas and promotion of ease of access for women at these service centers. Moreover, the policy also talks about the promotion of private sector investment in e-learning initiatives through tax-breaks and engagement with global online learning platforms for provision of quality content in regional languages. The policy document aims to address all aspects of the IT sector, including industry, entrepreneurship, academia etc.

IT sector in Pakistan is growing rapidly, which is evident from the IT exports figures of reliable sources. Providing support and creating a conducive environment for the IT & other related businesses has been among the top priorities of the Government of Punjab. Various steps have been taken in this regard which include payment of government taxes such as stamp duty through e-stamping; collection of other government receipts through online mediums; getting permission to start a new business under ease of doing business initiatives; acquiring hassle-free warehouse construction permits from e-Khidmat Markaz; tax exemptions for Telecoms sector & IT businesses; construction of technology parks and knowledge parks; and facilitation in setting up a new industry in any of the industrial zones in Punjab through One Window Service Centers (OWSC).

Some of the proposed initiatives are the establishment of the dedicated Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Cities for Information Technology through which the industry will greatly benefit from tax breaks and exemptions in export duties, among other things; construction of technology parks in Lahore and other cities of the province; and reduction in taxes on IT & IT enabled businesses which will not only facilitate these businesses, but will also bring more businesses into the tax net. The government also plans to take extensive measures for the formation of the hardware manufacturing industry through ODMs along with proposing an e-commerce regime by means of technical and legal considerations.

Bridging the digital divide across different groups and segments of the society has been one of the key focus areas of the government and will continue to be. Some of the most significant schemes, in this regard, are merit based distribution of laptops among students; establishment of Chief Minister's e-Rozgaar Centers across Punjab which enables the recent graduates to polish and monetize their skillset; formation of e-libraries in Punjab where citizen from all walks of life and age groups are utilizing online knowledge base comprising of millions of resources; installation of Wi-Fi hotspots in big cities and availability of online textbooks under the E-Learn program as well as provision of tablets in schools.

Empowering citizens through online petitions platform which shall deal with social and other relevant issues; setting up of regional offices of PITB across Punjab; providing trainings on emerging ideas such as Internet of Things (IoT); and serving the vulnerable groups of the society by providing them free and easily accessible ICT resources in an inclusive manner, included the policy.

During the last five years, computerization of all police stations in Punjab; creation of Police Khidmat centres in all 36 districts of Punjab; automation of Criminal Record office; introduction of Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) in DHQs/ THQs; verification of attendance of doctors and paramedics through biometric attendance system; supervision of the health, education, agriculture, livestock and irrigation field staff through SIM enabled phones and tablets; improvement of the vaccination coverage from 22% to 92% across Punjab under eVaccs; compilation of real time feedback from monitoring staff for 52,394 schools in Punjab; collection of government receipts in a transparent and accountable manner; implementation of e-filing & office automation systems in different public sector entities; upgradation of the development budget making and monitoring through Smart Monitoring of Development Projects (SMDP); establishment of a state of the art tier-III data center for Government of Punjab; initiation of video conference facility for better, economical and efficient communication across public sector offices in Punjab; establishment of Government of Punjab's citizen contact center in order to run multiple helplines for several government departments; and computerization of land records of over 55.5 million agricultural land owners under land record management information system.