

Special Lecture on **PAKISTAN-KAZAKHSTAN RELATIONS:** Opportunities to Enhance Cooperation by His Excellency Yerzhan Kistafin

Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan
Organised By MUSLIM Institute

MUSLIM Institute organized a special lecture on 'Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations: opportunities to enhance cooperation' at MUSLIM Institute Islamabad on January 27 2022. Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin delivered the special lecture. Chairman MUSLIM Institute & Dewan of Junagadh State Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali shared his welcoming remarks. Mr. Usama Bin Ashraf research associate MUSLIM Institute Moderated the proceeding of the session. People from different walks of life participated in the event.



Remarks by the Speakers

The Brief Summary of the remarks shared by honourable speakers:

Thirty years ago, on February 24 1992, Pakistan and Kazakhstan signed an agreement establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. Since then, the two states have gradually been developing cooperation mainly at the political level. The two sides have also been engaged in an excellent dialogue between the leaders and the ministers of foreign affairs, on regular basis, by organizing different events dedicated to discussing bilateral agenda and regional issues especially within the framework of organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Presently, military cooperation is the most developed area between both states. Unfortunately, little attention was paid to economic cooperation in past. Bilateral trade for last year was just about \$45 million US dollars.

In February 2020, the 9th session of inter-governmental joint commission of Pakistan and Kazakhstan was organized in Islamabad. It was agreed to start three working groups on trade, transportation, and energy. In November 2020, an online session was held between the two states on the joint working group for transport and trade. More importantly, in December 2021, Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Imran Khan announced to approve direct flights between Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

Pakistan and Kazakhstan are two brotherly countries that share a common history, culture, religion, and civilization. Both states enjoy cordial relations based on mutual respect, cooperation, economic integration, and a common approach towards world issues. There are several converging points between both countries, which could further strengthen bilateral cooperation despite the political rivalries, economic complications and social chaos prevailing in the region.



The Central Asian region is undergoing a paradigm shift aimed at further enhancing regional connectivity through greater regional cooperation and socio-economic integration. Similarly, Pakistan has shifted its focus from geo-strategics to geoeconomics which is encouraging both countries to utilize their geographical importance for economic cooperation. Kazakhstan is the linchpin of China's Belt and Road initiative due to its geographical location and vast natural resources. Similarly, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of BRI that has huge potential for regional economic integration. Pakistan provides a natural link to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia.

At the inter-regional and intra-regional levels, Pakistan can offer critical land routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions. Therefore, rigorous commercial or economic diplomacy is the need of the hour. Though there is a huge potential for cooperation in the field of energy such as oil and gas, civil nuclear cooperation, and renewable energy, however, lack of direct geographical communications between both countries hampers bilateral economic and trade cooperation and coordination. Therefore, "innovative plans" should be focused to enhance connectivity. The reconstruction and renovation of the Karakoram Highway in the 2000s greatly expanded Pakistan's access to western China. Karakoram Highway could be expanded to be utilized to enhance regional connectivity.



Another option could be the potential links between Islamabad and Astana through the connection of railways such as Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran and Pakistan-Iran-Turkey. Kazakhstan's new economic policy 'Nurly Zhol' to develop and modernize roads, railways and ports converge Pakistan's policies under CPEC such as the up-gradation and dualization of ML-1. The Pakistan-Iran-Turkey railway route has further enhanced the possibility of the realization of this plan. Strong political commitments and the inclusion of private sectors could be beneficial for the desired goals of socio-economic integration and greater regional connectivity.

Moreover, both the states can work closely to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. The security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has proved to be one of the major impediments to geographical connectivity and economic integration. Stability in Afghanistan, after the US withdrawal, could be a "game-changer" for the rest of the region. Both the countries could cooperate and coordinate to avert the looming worst humanitarian crises in Afghanistan. For this purpose, both countries could utilize regional and international platforms such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the United Nations.



Both the states can work together to enhance strategic cooperation in the field of anti-insurgency, counter-terrorism, military training, joint military exercises, etc. Both countries have huge potential to work on literature to enhance social integration and people-to-people connectivity.

Translation and exchange of Sufi literature could help counter evils of extremism, and radicalization as Sufi literature inculcate ideas and practices such as love, peace, harmony, and peaceful co-existence. For this purpose, the channel of tourism could be utilized. Enhanced people to people contact on a regular exchange between universities, organizations, artists, research centers, and mass media may deepen cooperation in the fields of education, research, science, culture, art, tourism, and sports. In December, an MoU was signed between Quaid-e-Azam University and Kazakh Technical University which is evidence of flourishing academic cooperation.

These days, Pakistan and Kazakhstan are facing different challenges in joint working groups due to the communication gap. People to people ties are helpful in bilateral relations. It is high time for both states to revive bilateral relations in culture, history and religion. There is a need to improve relations by exchanging information on history, culture and current situation of the region. For this purpose, ministry of information of both the states can play an active role. For business-to-business ties, a five-day exhibition is planned in Pakistan and for that propose more than 100 companies have been requested to participate in the event. The president of Kazakhstan has plan to visit Pakistan in September 2022 which will further improve the joint working activities. Through OBOR projects, like China, Pakistan can reach towards the Eurasian or Central Asian market and European markets. Pakistan can also reach the European markets within 40 to 45 days via OBOR. There is a dire need to further "diversify" and "intensify" the Pak-Kazakh bilateral cooperation in all these areas.

Interactive Session

A brief summary of the discussion extracted from the interactive session is as follows:

Q. Is there any student-exchange program between Pakistan and Kazakhstan?

A. Regarding co-operation in education, Kazakh Minister for Education signed an MoU in 2003 for an exchange program of students. However, it needs further development to enhance ties between young generations by increasing the current figure of around 1000 students. Surely, within this year, the number of students will be growing. The need is to develop connections, not only between universities but also among youth organizations of two countries.

Q. Like the middle-eastern states, Central Asian Republics (CARs) are another hotspot for great power politics because of their natural resources. Keeping in view the uprisings in regional countries, is it the start of a new Arab spring like situation in CARs?

A. When it comes to the Central Asian region, it has different levels of economic development and political reforms. Preferably being specific to Kazakhstan, the year 2022 began with a very tragic event as a peaceful protest, started in the western part of Kazakhstan, turned into an attempt to coup d'état destabilising the country with the help of internal and external forces. Kazakhstan is one of the most developed countries and the biggest economies in Central Asia, it is true, however, there is room for developing socio-economic policy to meet the needs of the common people. Hopefully, social justice in a country with only 19-million-population is achievable. So, it is unlike an Arab spring in Central Asia.

Q. Please shed light on cooperation in the energy sector in relations of the two states.

A. Energy demand is growing in Pakistan. If Afghanistan is stabilized, many things can be accomplished, including building pipelines and connecting Kazakhstan with Pakistan, which is another big and most popular project- TAPI.



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