

Uzbekistan and Pakistan strengthen strategic partnership through expert dialogue



The Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS), jointly with the Institute of Regional Studies of Pakistan and with the support of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Pakistan, organized an expert online conference titled “Uzbekistan – Pakistan: Strategic Partnership, Connectivity, and Sustainable Development in a Changing World”.

The conference was attended by the heads of the two countries' diplomatic missions, as well as leadership and experts from leading analytical and educational centers in Uzbekistan and Pakistan, and representatives of the business community and the diplomatic corps.

During the conference, participants thoroughly discussed priority areas for cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, including political dialogue and regional security, the development of trade, economic, and industrial cooperation, as well as collaboration in education, professional training, digitalization, and new technologies.

Experts noted that relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan have reached a qualitatively new level, transforming into a strategic partnership. This has primarily been made possible by the decisive role and political will of the two states' leaders. The high level of trust and constructive dialogue between the leaders of Uzbekistan and Pakistan, as well as shared long-term interests in security, the economy, and regional development, provide a solid foundation for further deepening comprehensive, practical cooperation.



Opening the event, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies Eldor Aripov stated that relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan have advanced to a qualitatively new institutional level. According to him, the establishment of the Strategic Partnership Council has been a significant confirmation of the transition to a systematic, long-term model of engagement. This approach reflects a common understanding that closer ties between Central and South Asia are not a temporary initiative, but an objective necessity driven by shared strategic interests.

The Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies noted that the dynamics of trade and economic cooperation confirm the growing potential of bilateral ties: in recent years, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has increased twelvefold, and the partners' medium-term goal is to raise it to \$2 billion.

Speaking about future priorities, the ISRS Director emphasized the importance of moving from simple trade to the development of high-value joint value chains, as well as strengthening cooperation in information technology, education, and professional training.

Eldor Aripov also drew special attention to the strategic significance of the Trans-Afghan Corridor, stressing that it is not merely a transport route, but a geo-economic project capable of drastically reducing delivery times and transforming the region into a key hub of Eurasian connectivity.

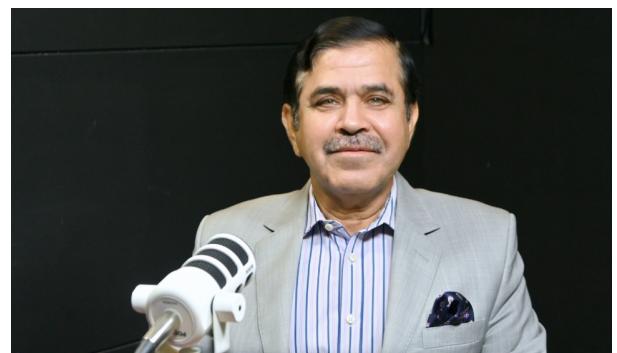
Addressing the conference participants, the President of the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, Jauhar Saleem, noted that "trust and constructive dialogue between the leadership of the two countries create a solid foundation for practical initiatives". He emphasized that relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan cover key areas of cooperation, including the economy, trade, energy, education, and culture. "We see enormous potential in expanding joint educational programs and technological exchange. This is a strategically important moment for the region, facilitating broader access to markets and strengthening economic stability", the expert added.





In turn, former Minister of State and Chairman of the Board of Investment of Pakistan, Haroon Sharif, stressed the importance of institutional decisions and private sector participation. "Trade becomes sustainable only when it is supported by real investment and effective economic mechanisms", he said.

The economist proposed establishing market-oriented financial structures and joint investment platforms to support businesses. "The private sector must have access to financing - this will enhance the effectiveness of integration", Mr. Haroon Sharif added. He also noted the need to develop joint transport infrastructure, including dry ports and logistics hubs: "Only coordinated approaches can reduce costs and make cooperation economically viable".



Major General Muhammad Samrez Salik, a lecturer at the National Defence University in Islamabad, highlighted the high geo-economic potential of Pakistan and Uzbekistan. "Pakistan and Uzbekistan can become the core of the region's economic integration if the strengths of each state are effectively leveraged", he stated.

The General also emphasized the strategic importance of transport corridors: "The Trans-Afghan railway is capable of reducing cargo transit time from Uzbekistan to the ports of Pakistan from 35 days to just 3-5 days. This is a direct economic advantage that should not be overlooked".

The expert added: "We see significant untapped trade potential. Integration through joint projects and logistics networks can transform the region's economic landscape".



Amina Khan, Director of the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, underscored the importance of investing in human capital as the foundation of sustainable partnerships. "Infrastructure connects countries. However, it is people – through education, skills, and technology – who ensure the sustainability of partnership", she stated.

The expert noted Uzbekistan's progress in educational reforms and digital transformation, and Pakistan's potential in English-language higher education and in cooperation in the medical and research fields. "Cooperation in education and technology is a low-risk, high-impact path that deepens bilateral ties and promotes regional integration", she emphasized.

At the bilateral level, Amina Khan proposed establishing a Pakistan – Uzbekistan dialogue on human capital and technology to advance technical and vocational education. According to her, "joint research helps address both bilateral and regional challenges by creating locally grounded solutions that have so far been lacking".

Amina Khan also proposed developing trilateral cooperation with Afghanistan, primarily to scale up initiatives to enhance connectivity between Central and South Asia. As an example, she cited the Termez International Trade Center Free Trade Zone. According to her, "it is not merely a border crossing, but a fully-fledged economic system – an ecosystem of people-to-people contacts, as well as education, medical services, trade, and regional transit".



Aziza Muhammedova, Leading Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced International Studies under the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, added that "without stable security, ambitious plans for development and integration are simply impossible. Joint counterterrorism measures, intelligence sharing, and defense cooperation are now viewed as essential conditions for economic growth and regional integration. Transport and trade projects, including the Uzbekistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan railway, create economic incentives and reduce instability".



Shokhjakhon Shikhnazarov, Chief Specialist of the Center for Transport and Logistics Studies under the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, emphasized the practical importance of transport and logistics cooperation: "By the end of 2025, cargo volumes through the ports of Pakistan reached 450,000 tons, which is 37% higher than the previous year. This reduces delivery times and lowers logistics costs. For the effective functioning of these routes, international cooperation, joint forums, and pilot projects are necessary, including the development of the multimodal corridor Belarus – Russia – Kazakhstan – Uzbekistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan, and new railway lines through Afghanistan".

Summing up, the conference participants concluded that the development of the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Pakistan requires a transition to a multidimensional model of cooperation based on industrial collaboration, technology, education, joint production chains, and coordinated approaches to sustainable development.

Following the conference, an agreement was reached to establish Uzbekistan – Pakistan Expert Council between the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, which will serve as a permanent platform for analytical support of the strategic partnership, coordination of joint initiatives, and the preparation of recommendations for the political leadership.