

A Historic Visit: New Horizons of the Strategic Partnership between Uzbekistan and Pakistan



The state visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to Pakistan, by its scale, depth of agenda, and achieved results, can rightfully be characterized as historic. It not only consolidated the transition of bilateral relations to a qualitatively new level, but also effectively formalized Uzbek-Pakistani interaction in the format of a comprehensive strategic partnership that goes far beyond the traditional interstate dialogue.

The visit program was exceptionally intensive and reflected the parties' aspiration to build a long-term, institutionally sustainable model of cooperation. The key political event was the first meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council at the highest level, established in February 2025 during the visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, to Uzbekistan. The launch of this mechanism marks a transition from fragmented interaction to systematic coordination of policy, the economy, and the humanitarian agenda at the highest level.

Separate negotiations with the President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, confirmed the high level of political trust and the convergence of approaches on key issues of developing bilateral relations, regional security, and sustainable development. As part of the visit, a meeting was also held with the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces of Pakistan – the Chief of the Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, which reflects the mutual desire to expand cooperation in the field of security and military-technical interaction.

Today, such cooperation is especially relevant amid global uncertainty, fragmentation of supply chains, the strengthening of protectionism, the growth of geopolitical contradictions, as well as climate and resource challenges. Under these conditions, the strategic partnership between Tashkent and Islamabad acts as one of the key factors of resilience and stability of the entire macro-region, providing a reliable platform for a joint response to contemporary challenges.

A distinctive feature of the current stage of Uzbek-Pakistani relations is their comprehensive nature. The partnership covers politics, the economy, investment, transport and infrastructure, industrial cooperation, digital technologies, education, science, and culture. In essence, this concerns the formation of a new model of interregional connectivity that contributes to job creation, income growth for the population, and strengthening the resilience of the economies of the two countries. In a broader context, this cooperation becomes a factor in shaping a new connectivity architecture of Central and South Asia, enhancing economic growth and regional stability.

The economic dimension of the visit became the central practical outcome. The high level of political trust created a solid foundation for the dynamic development of trade and investment, which today act as the main drivers of bilateral interaction. Thus, over the period from 2017 to 2025, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Pakistan increased from approximately USD 30 million to nearly USD 500 million, demonstrating growth of more than fifteenfold in less than a decade. As the nearest strategic goal, the parties identified bringing the volume of mutual trade to USD 2 billion, supported by an agreement to establish a joint working group and develop a five-year "roadmap."

At the same time, not only quantitative growth is observed, but also a qualitative transformation of the trade structure. A more diversified and sustainable model is being formed, including products with high added value: industrial goods, textiles, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and construction materials. During the visit, the parties reached an agreement to expand the list of trade preferences: a preferential regime will be applied to more than 40 commodity items on each side, and an increase in the number of phytosanitary permits is also envisaged. These measures significantly reduce trade barriers and contribute to accelerating the growth of bilateral trade turnover.

Investment cooperation demonstrates a steady positive dynamic. In 2024, the volume of Pakistani investments in the economy of Uzbekistan amounted to about USD 33 million, and over the period since the beginning of 2025 it has increased more than twofold—to nearly USD 70 million—reflecting the growing interest of Pakistan's private sector in joint projects and the strengthening of confidence in the country's investment climate. Currently, around 230 enterprises with the participation of Pakistani capital operate in Uzbekistan, which significantly exceeds the indicators of previous years. These companies operate in agriculture, the textile and food industries, the mining sector, the production of construction materials, pharmaceuticals, as well as in the banking and financial sphere.

For the practical implementation of these strategic and investment priorities, a business forum was held as part of the visit with the participation of the President of Uzbekistan and the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The forum became a key platform for discussing specific joint projects, strengthening business ties, and expanding cooperation in high-technology and manufacturing sectors. It also created opportunities for personnel training, the introduction of modern technologies, and access to new markets, which directly supports the goals of technological modernization and economic development of Uzbekistan.

The President of Uzbekistan held separate meetings with the leadership of leading Pakistani companies—Engro Group, Gohar Textile, Go Group, and HRL Group—operating in agriculture, the food, textile, and chemical industries. Specific joint projects, the introduction of modern technologies, the development of systems for training highly qualified personnel, and the expansion of export potential were discussed. The agreements reached are of strategic importance for the economy of Uzbekistan, as they contribute to the technological modernization of key sectors, the strengthening of the private sector, the expansion of access to international markets, and the creation of long-term joint investment projects.

During the visit, a portfolio of joint projects with a total value of about USD 3.5 billion was formed, which indicates serious and long-term business interest in bilateral cooperation. The institutional strengthening of economic interaction is further ensured by the decision to establish the Uzbek-Pakistani Business Council, which will become a permanent platform for coordinating joint projects, direct interaction between enterprises, the exchange of experience, and the development of business initiatives at the level of

economic actors.

Overall, concrete confirmation of the multifaceted nature of Uzbek-Pakistani relations was provided by the adoption during the visit of a substantial package of more than 30 bilateral documents. It covers virtually the entire spectrum of modern interstate interaction—foreign policy and security, trade, economic and investment cooperation, industry, agriculture, digital technologies, science and education, culture, ecology, emergency situations, as well as humanitarian and law-enforcement spheres.

Evidence of the depth and broad scope of the achieved agreements was their extension to the regional and academic levels. A decision was made to establish a Forum of Regions, and mechanisms of direct interaction between the cities of Termez and Peshawar, Samarkand and Islamabad were also formalized, creating a sustainable institutional foundation for the development of interregional cooperation, business contacts, and humanitarian exchanges. In parallel, agreements were signed between the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamabad Institute of Strategic Studies, as well as between Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies and the University of Peshawar. These arrangements form a long-term platform for joint training of personnel, the implementation of scientific and educational programs, and expert support of the bilateral agenda, filling the strategic partnership with practical content and ensuring its sustainability.

The strategic significance of the visit was particularly vividly manifested in the transport and logistics agenda. Further expansion of trade and industrial cooperation directly depends on the development of transit connectivity, and in this context special attention was paid to the Trans-Afghan railway corridor project. This project is viewed not merely as an infrastructure initiative, but as a key geoeconomic element capable of providing the shortest access for Central Asian countries to the ports of the Indian Ocean and integrating Afghanistan into regional economic processes.

The implementation of the Trans-Afghan railway project will make it possible to reduce cargo delivery times between Pakistan and Uzbekistan from the current 35 days to 3-5 days, reduce transport costs by 30-40 percent, ensure the transportation of up to 3 million tons of cargo per year at the initial stage, and create prerequisites for increasing this volume to 15-20 million tons.

A significant complement to these plans were the agreements on the development of multimodal routes, including the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China-Pakistan corridor, as well as the expansion of direct air connections with Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, which strengthens logistical connectivity between the regions and creates new opportunities for trade and economic cooperation.

An important element of the visit was industrial and technological cooperation. The parties agreed to expand cooperation in the textile, food, pharmaceutical, and perfumery industries, the production of construction materials, electrical engineering, and logistics. A separate strategic emphasis was placed on digital interaction—the creation of joint IT clusters, support for startups, the development of digital solutions for business and public services, as well as the exchange of experience in the field of artificial intelligence and “smart” technologies. Digital cooperation is viewed as one of the key instruments for accelerating technological modernization and enhancing the global competitiveness of the economies of the two countries.

An integral part of the strategic partnership remains the cultural and humanitarian dimension, based on centuries-old historical and civilizational commonality. A steady growth of educational cooperation is observed: the number of Pakistani students in Uzbekistan increased from about 1.3 thousand in 2023 to more than 1.6 thousand in 2025, making Pakistan one of the key sources of foreign students in the country and reflecting the strengthening of academic and scientific ties between the states.

Positive dynamics are also evident in the cultural and humanitarian dimension of the strategic partnership, which consistently complements and reinforces the economic agenda of bilateral relations. In particular, tourism cooperation demonstrates steady growth: in 2025, the number of tourists from Pakistan exceeded

10 thousand people, increasing almost 2.5 times compared to 2023. A significant role in this was played by the launch of direct flights, as well as the holding of more than 25 joint cultural and tourism events. These data clearly confirm that such areas as education, science, tourism, and culture are developing just as dynamically as trade and economic interaction, forming a strong socio-humanitarian foundation for a long-term strategic partnership.

In order to expand humanitarian contacts and mutual cultural exchange, the parties agreed to hold Weeks of Uzbek Culture and Days of Uzbek Cinema in Pakistan in the current year, and paid special attention to the issues of establishing systemic cooperation in the field of pilgrimage tourism, which has significant potential for further rapprochement between the peoples of the two countries. An additional step in this direction was the initiative of the Head of State to establish a joint cultural center in the city of Lahore to promote the heritage of the Baburids, intended to become a symbol of shared historical memory and a sustainable platform for deepening cultural dialogue between Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

High political and symbolic recognition of the state visit was given by the awarding to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, of Pakistan's highest state award—the Nishan-e-Pakistan Order—as well as the conferral of the title of honorary doctor and professor of the National University of Sciences and Technology of Pakistan. These decisions reflect recognition of the personal contribution of the Head of Uzbekistan to strengthening bilateral friendship and the strategic partnership, as well as a high assessment of the course of reforms and modernization being pursued in the country.

The conferral of an academic title by a leading Pakistani university underscores openness to scientific and educational exchange, stimulates the development of joint research programs, and also strengthens intercultural and humanitarian ties between the countries. Decisions to immortalize shared historical memory—the creation of Tashkent Street and Babur Park in Islamabad—also carry symbolic significance. These initiatives not only emphasize the historical and cultural closeness of the peoples of Uzbekistan and Pakistan, but also serve as a long-term platform for popularizing shared history, developing cultural tourism, and strengthening friendly ties between the countries.

Special attention should be given to the institutionalization of expert dialogue. The signing of a memorandum on the establishment of the Uzbek-Pakistani Expert Council between the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Institute of Regional Studies of Pakistan forms a sustainable platform for strategic analysis, monitoring the implementation of agreements, and developing practical recommendations for public authorities.

Overall, the visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to Islamabad became a landmark event that not only recorded the achieved level of strategic partnership, but also laid a solid foundation for its further deepening. It gave a powerful impetus to the implementation of joint initiatives and strengthened the role of Uzbek-Pakistani cooperation as one of the key factors of resilience, connectivity, and development of Central and South Asia in conditions of global turbulence.

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