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FRIENDSHIP AT A DISTANCE

– *Your Excellency, last year, despite the pandemic, friendship between Pakistan and Ukraine strengthened, although 2020 was a difficult year for everyone. The COVID-19 restrictions caused a certain lull in the diplomatic arena, and members of the diplomatic corps had to adapt quickly to new realities.*

– We have withstood this difficult time with dignity, providing consular services and supporting the diaspora. Pakistan has managed to curb the spread of the virus thanks to testing, electronic tracking system, and a selective lockdown. We are currently producing our own vaccine and looking forward to the improvement of the situation. The Embassy of Pakistan is grateful to the State Enterprise “Directorate-General for Rendering Services to Diplomatic Missions”, which continued providing services regardless of the quarantine restrictions, particularly by organising a conference at the National University of Ostroh Academy, which allowed us to share experience and communicate with young people.

In 1991, Pakistan recognised the independence of Ukraine, and in 1993, the process of establishing diplomatic ties was launched; representative offices in our countries began their work in 1998. Since then, the two countries have built friendly bilateral relations based on mutual respect and trust. The May visit of General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan, provides an impetus to strengthening bilateral relations and opening new opportunities for cooperation.

Pakistan seeks to expand bilateral cooperation with Ukraine, covering all spheres of life, including trade, people-to-people contacts, tourism, defence, and high-level visits. From my standpoint, the main goal implies closer ties between our peoples, considering the fact that our countries are quite distant from one another in terms of geography, culture, and society. Last year, the embassy facilitated the visit of Dmytro Komarov to Pakistan. Since 13 February 2021, a new season of the *World Inside Out* programme has been broadcast on the 1+1 TV channel every Saturday. This season, Dmytro Komarov has focused on unique cultural features, which, I reckon, have made viewers want to learn more about the historic land called Pakistan, its inhabitants and rich culture. I will take this opportunity to tell you more about the history of my country.

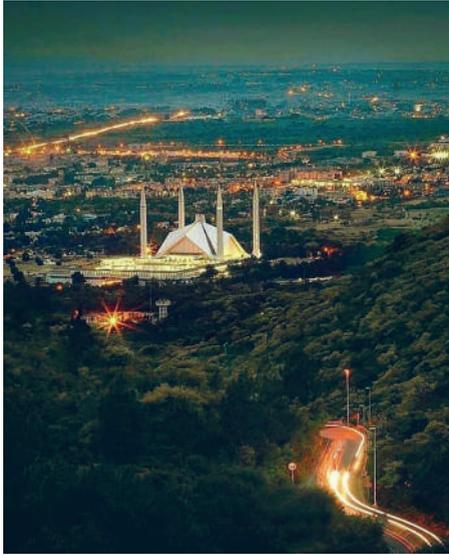
More than seven decades ago, Pakistan was cut off from the subcontinent; this country is known for its ancient history, diverse civilisations, opulent culture, religions, and fabulous heritage. Historians note that our roots go back to the large Neolithic site of Mehrgarh, the cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, which belong to the Indus Valley Civilisation (about 3300–1300 BC). The civilisation of the Indus Valley was supplanted by the Aryans, and later, these lands were ruled by the Achaemenid and Seleucid dynasties, the Mauryan, Kushan, and Gupta Empires. The civilisations developed, prospered, and disappeared on the well-irrigated plains of the Indus River with its numerous tributaries. The Indus, similarly to the Dniπρο, flows from north to south and irrigates both parts of the country, allowing people to develop agriculture.

In 712 AD, Muhammad ibn Qasim opened the subcontinent to Muslim rulers and empires, namely the Hindu Shahis, the Ghaznavid dynasty, the Delhi Sultanate, and the Durrani tribe. In 1526, Babur born Zahir ud-Din Muhammad founded the Mughal Empire, which lasted until 1857. The most striking example of the Mughal heritage is the Taj Mahal. The British drove out the Mughals and colonised most of the subcontinent. In 1947, they were forced to leave the territory as a result of the struggle for freedom led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Quaid-i-Azam (Great Leader), who demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. The vast majority of Pakistan's population are Muslim, but many are Hindu and Christian.



Палац Мохатти – пам'ятка історії в місті Карачі на півдні Пакистану

Mohatta Palace is a historical landmark located in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi



Исламабад – столиця Пакистану. Зведена в 1960-х роках для перенесення столиці з міста Карачі
Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan founded in the 1960s to replace Karachi as the capital

In 1933, Choudhry Rahmat Ali named his homeland Pakistan, which means ‘land of the pure’. Each letter has its own meaning: P – Punjab, A – Afghania, which is a northern province bordering Afghanistan and is now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, K – Kashmir, S – Sindh, and Tan – Baluchistan. Each of the provinces has its own identity, culture, and official languages, which are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Kashmiri, and Balochi. Since the founding of Pakistan, the people have professed the principles of faith, unity, and discipline, proudly calling themselves Pakistanis.

Pakistan was founded on 14 August 1947. The principle of partition was introduced by the British, under which the territories inhabited by Muslims were to be ceded

to Pakistan. However, India forcibly occupied the largest provinces – Junagadh, Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan supports the people of Kashmir in their quest for freedom. The issue of Kashmir was raised by India in the UN Security Council and enshrined in the relevant UN resolutions on granting the right of self-determination to the people of Kashmir through a plebiscite. In 1948, India took away the fundamental rights of the people of Kashmir, which led to the conflict between Pakistan and India. Our country supports and will continue supporting the people of Kashmir in their quest for self-determination.

Quaid-i-Azam (Great Leader) Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared Urdu the national language of Pakistan, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan subgroup and developed in the 6-13th centuries on the Central subcontinent. Urdu replaced Persian, which had been used during court hearings at the time of the Mughal Empire. The word *urdu* comes from the Turkish language and means ‘camp’. Writing uses the style of the Persian calligraphy called *Nasta’liq* and is read from right to left. The language includes borrowings from Turkish, Persian, and Hindi. Urdu is spoken by 66 million people, and 170 million use it as a second language. Besides Pakistan, it is spoken in India, Nepal, and in cities with large numbers of migrants.

At the time of its founding, Pakistan included East and West Pakistan, but in 1971, East Pakistan seceded and is now called Bangladesh.

Pakistan, like Ukraine, is located at historic crossroads, connecting Eurasia with South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Historically, the Silk Road was a trade artery connecting countries and regions. We are currently reviving this heritage through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) national proj-

ect, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Work on the first phase of the CPEC has been completed, and the second phase is currently underway, during which special economic zones (SEZs) are to be established. The SEZs offer beneficial options to investors, and some Ukrainian companies have already visited Pakistan to explore this possibility. I encourage other companies to follow suit.

The modern citizens of Pakistan are friendly, open-minded, and willing to cooperate. To further strengthen people-to-people contacts and tourism, Pakistan has reduced visa fees by 40 percent and simplified the process of obtaining visas for businessmen online within 24 hours. It should be noted that the flow of tourists to Pakistan has increased. I would advise Ukraine to reconsider its travel recommendations to Pakistan and to reduce the visa fee for our mutual benefit. We also encourage TV channels to visit Pakistan to bring the two peoples closer together. In my opinion, Pakistanis need to visit Ukraine to get to know this country.

– *Your Excellency, it should be noted that despite the pandemic, trade turnover between our countries has increased by a factor of 2.5, and the exchange of delegations took place as planned (in compliance with all anti-epidemic measures). Please tell us about this area of work in more detail.*

– In December, with a view to deepening cooperation, I took part in a round table organised by the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Apart from the exchange of ideas on business development, events were held



Велосипедна подорож Пакистаном – це можливість споглядати дивовижну красу природи й стародавню культуру

The cycle tour of Pakistan is an opportunity to experience astounding natural beauty and ancient culture



Народ калаші тепло та барвисто зустрів герцога й герцогиню Кембриджських під час їхньої подорожі Пакистаном
 The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have been given a warm and colourful welcome to a settlement of the Kalash people on their tour of Pakistan

that facilitated the February visit of the trade delegation and the B2B conference. The Chernihiv Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry plans to visit Pakistan, whereas the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry seek to strengthen cooperation in the near future. In my view, it is necessary to hold a long-awaited meeting of the Joint Ukrainian-Pakistani Commission on Economic Cooperation, negotiate with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan and sign the necessary agreements. The realisation of the aforementioned initiatives provides an opportunity to rapidly expand trade turnover.

Pakistan produces quality sporting goods and medical instruments, which, unfortunately, are not represented on the Ukrainian market. We invited a delegation of sporting goods manufacturers to visit Ukraine. Pakistani mango, which is renowned all over the world for its unsurpassed taste, is unfortunately unknown to Ukrainian consumers, and there is also a limited number of citrus fruits on the Ukrainian market.

The Pakistani diaspora in Ukraine is small. Most Pakistanis live in Odesa and are engaged in small and medium-sized businesses. Mr Iftikhar Ahmad Khat-tak, who heads the Ukrainian-Pakistani Society of Friendship and Business Cooperation in Odesa, promotes the rapprochement of the two peoples.

Muhammad Asad is the author of the book *The Road to Mecca* and a famous resident of Lviv. In the early 1990s, Assad travelled to the Middle East and the subcontinent, where he converted to Islam and participated in the Pakistani movement. Muhammad Assad became the first foreigner to receive a Pakistani passport. He later joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, where he served for the good of the country. We suggested that the mayor of Lviv use this opportunity to strengthen ties between our countries. Representatives of our diaspora – Mr Mohammad Zahoor and Kamaliia – support the community by means of active and extensive charitable activities both in Pakistan and Ukraine. Moreover, almost 400 Pakistani students study in Ukraine. During the pandemic, we have reviewed the structure of the community and created regional organisations, bringing them together through social media. This change has greatly facilitated the work of the consular department.

– *Your Excellency, tell us about military relations between Pakistan and Ukraine, which have a long history. In particular, it is known that Pakistan has bought tanks and power supplies for them in Ukraine.*

– Last year, despite the pandemic, our cooperation continued and, consequently, Pakistan and Ukraine signed a significant bilateral contract at the Expo-2021 exhibition in Dubai. Thanks to the visit of the Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan to Ukraine, our cooperation in the military sphere is expected to improve. In the course of the visit, General Qamar Javed Bajwa stressed the importance of interstate negotiations, joint ventures, and research.

Pakistan and Ukraine have all the necessary political, economic, and legal mechanisms laying a solid foundation for our relations. Today, Pakistan is focused on geo-economy, and we call on all countries of the world to stand by us on the path of growth and prosperity. The new Pakistan is open to everybody and is ready to cooperate.