
**ADDRESS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT THE 75th
ANNIVERSARY OF PAKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE.
26th SEPTEMBER 2022 INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES RUSSIAN
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, MOSCOW**

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on Human Rights (Pakistan)**

Our Honorable Hosts: Professor Natalya Romanova, Deputy Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Professor Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky, Chairman, Centre for the Study of Near and Middle Eastern Countries, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shafqat Ali Khan. My fellow Parliamentarians from Pakistan: Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar. Distinguished speakers, scholars, academicians. Ladies and Gentlemen! It is a pleasure and honor for me to be present here at this International Conference dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of Pakistan's independence. Your warm welcome, thoughtfulness and outstanding hospitality continue to win our heart. I would like to compliment and congratulate the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences on successfully hosting this wonderful event and for assembling a galaxy of experts who will be presenting on a wide range of key topics today, both online and in person.

Ladies and Gentlemen! On this auspicious occasion, I wish to make five points before you, and in so doing I will be touching upon many but not all of the themes included in the invitation letter you sent to us a few weeks ago. Ladies and Gentlemen! First and foremost, I would like to express my admiration for the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences as an important and world-famous academic institution. My dear Professors, my dear hosts, I commend you for the diligent investigation of the cultures, history, languages, literature and policies of Eastern countries that is carried out here under your auspices as I am myself directly familiar with the works and the great intellectual command of the scholars involved with this historic research organization. Strong institutions like this lie at the heart of progressive development and a strong framework of international cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Secondly, looking inwards at my country, as part of a pillar of the state — the legislature — and entrusted with the important subject of Human Rights, I submit to you that, domestically, there is broad consensus, across the political spectrum, across the multiparty system, on the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution, together with the continuity of the democratic process. Not only that, and not just the political leadership, but the nation as a whole, is now as conscious as ever about, and staunchly supports the upholding and enforcement, of the rights that are promised and guaranteed to it. Such as that, human dignity is inviolable, absolutely and unconditionally. That every person must be protected by law and be treated in accordance with law. That no action harmful to the life, liberty, body, reputation, property or privacy of any person shall be taken except in accordance with law. That every person is entitled to a fair trial and due process.

That no person shall be subjected to torture for the purpose of extracting evidence. That, subject to reasonable restrictions, every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression, every citizen has the right to form associations or unions, and every citizen has the right to assemble peacefully and without arms. In submitting all of this to you, I am merely reciting a small selection of fundamental rights that are promised and guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen! I submit to you, thirdly, that as a matter of foreign policy, there is again broad consensus, across the political spectrum, across the multiparty system, that we must promote and continue enjoying good relations with the Russian Federation. There is no doubt that Pakistan-Russia relations are marked by amity, cordiality, trust and mutual understanding. In particular, our relations have made impressive progress over the last two decades, since the start of this millennium. We remain convinced that our bilateral relations serve not only our respective national interests but also contribute to regional security and global stability. As we meet, Pakistan faces devastation at the hands of unprecedented floods that have resulted in huge human and material losses, and we greatly appreciate Russia's expression of solidarity and support. We are also grateful for Russia's support to Pakistan's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Both sides have maintained regular contacts at the highest level. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Russia on 23rd and 24th February 2022 and held summit talks with President Putin. Earlier, as Prime Minister, Imran Khan had a telephone conversation with President Putin on 17th January 2022, wherein the two leaders discussed development of Pakistan-Russia ties in trade, economy, energy and combatting the spread of coronavirus. The then Prime Minister appreciated President Putin's statements on the inadmissibility of any actions (under the pretext of freedom of expression), impairing the dignity of any religious, ethnic or social group. Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Putin also held meaningful discussions on Afghanistan and bilateral relations over the telephone on 25th August and 14th September 2021. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Pakistan on 6th and 7th April 2021. During the visit, wide-ranging talks covering bilateral relations and regional and global issues were held. On that occasion, I also had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with the Russian Foreign Minister at a lunch reception hosted by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Islamabad. As far as the current situation is concerned, Pakistan has good relations with both Russia and Ukraine and has been advocating a negotiated, peaceful resolution to the conflict. Maintaining its non-partisan approach, Pakistan has abstained from voting against Russia in various resolutions presented in international forums.

This, Ladies and Gentlemen, brings me to my fourth point: that in view of the strong foundation, the launching pad, that have been set up over the last two decades, Pakistan-Russia relations need to be taken to the next level. In the last about two decades, our two countries have signed more than a dozen Agreements on various aspects and levels of cooperation. Included among them are: (a) an historic Defense Cooperation Agreement of 2014 under which a key consultation architecture has been set up, and the joint exercises, seminars and visits during 2021 alone resulted in interaction between 600 defense personnel; and (b) the 2015 Agreement on the Development of the Pak Stream North South Gas Pipeline Project, which was further revised last year.

I submit to you that every country of the world is seeking energy security, and, in this regard, Pakistan and Russia need to proceed in a direction where the common man in Pakistan — I repeat the common man in Pakistan — sees, feels and enjoys the fruit of the relationship. That can come through expeditious implementation and completion of all such projects that bring cost effective energy to our gas-starved nation. It can also come through increasing our student exchanges (currently there are just 250–300 Pakistani students in Russia), it can come through increase in trade, which stands at a mere US\$ 500 million at present, particularly in the area of agriculture, and it can come through

more people-to-people contacts. In this context, both Russia and Pakistan must remain mindful that no third country should be allowed any sway over setting the parameters of our bilateral relationship and taking it to the next level. Ladies and Gentlemen! Fifthly and lastly, I refer to the ground-breaking visit to Moscow of President Ayub Khan in April 1965. During the summit meetings then held, the Soviet leadership comprising Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksei Kosygin, Anastas Mikoyan and Andrei Gromyko alleged before the President of Pakistan that the Western powers were pursuing a policy of enslaving the people of Asia, and accused Pakistan of acting as an instrument of this policy. Let me make it clear at this juncture, in this day and age, the Pakistani nation is acutely conscious of its place on this planet, and is not ready, is not willing, and is not going to accept enslavement by any power on this earth. Friendship yes, trade yes, cooperation yes, peaceful coexistence yes, we remain open to that with every country of the world, but enslavement shall not be acceptable. Going back to the summit meetings of April 1965, Pakistan's Information Secretary at the time, Altaf Gauhar, who was accompanying President Ayub Khan, recollected: 'Brezhnev put his hand in his right pocket and pulled it out saying, «See I have kept nothing in my pocket. Everything here is above board.» He said that Soviet Union had attached «paramount importance» to Ayub's visit. There was no superficiality or demagoguery in the talks, which had proceeded on the right lines. The relations between the two countries could be improved, trade expanded, visits exchanged, and technical know-how provided by the Soviet Union... Again he said, «Mr. President, you can look into my pocket, I have nothing but a comb,» and he proceeded to brandish a small brown comb. Ayub responded by showing him his pocket, saying that he too had nothing there: «I wear my heart on my sleeve...»¹

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me tell you, last, but not least, I am mindful that I also represent before you Dr. Muhammad Iqbal — Allama Iqbal as we call him in Pakistan. He does not belong to me, he belongs to all of us, and all of you here. And he is someone who did not wear his heart on his sleeve — he put his heart in his pen, which pen he then put to paper. In so doing, one of the subjects, one of the matters, which he had great interest in, a great passion for — like an *'ashiq* — was the subject of Asia, the subject of the East. This is reflected, foremost, in his Persian work from 1923, *Payaam-e Mashriq* (Message from the East), and also in another work that I was examining on my way to the airport at Lahore for this trip to Moscow — his Persian work *Mathnavi Pas Che Bayad Kard O Aqwaam-e-Sharq* (What is to be Done O Nations of the East), which was published thirteen years later in 1936, just two years before his death. His love, his passion, for Asia was such that he wanted to see an Asian renaissance, and he considered his community as a community that would be the custodian of the nations of the land of Asia. Why Asia? Because Asia is the largest Continent on this earth, stretching all the way from the Far East on one side, all the way to Europe and Africa on the other. Asia has the largest population on this earth. And guess what? The largest part of that land mass is the country of Russia. He wrote in Urdu:

Ye Nukta Sargazbat-E-Millat-E-Baira Se Hai
Paida Ke Aqwam-E-Zameen-E-Asia Ka Pasban Tu Hai
This principle rises from the story of the Radiant Community—
You are the guardian of the nations of the land of Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us work together to become that radiant community, that vibrant community, which would be the guardian, the custodian, of the nations of the land of Asia. I thank you.

¹ Altaf Gauhar, Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler. Lahore, 1993. Pp. 300–301.