

Nadir KHAN,
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the
Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Ukraine*

A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED

— *Your Excellency, having spent one year in Ukraine as Ambassador, how would you outline your opinion and understanding of Ukraine–Pakistan diplomatic relations?*

— In my opinion and understanding, Pakistan and Ukraine are maintaining good diplomatic relations as two friendly countries. Pakistan recognised Ukraine immediately after its independence on 31 December 1991, and our diplomatic relations were established in March 1992. The institutional mechanisms between the two countries are in place, including a forum for bilateral political consultations as well as forums of economic and defence cooperation. Ukraine and Pakistan have signed a number of agreements. Still, there are numerous bilateral agreements pending finalisation due to the prevalent environment and challenges faced by both countries. The good thing is that the cooperation between Ukraine and Pakistan continues despite the ongoing war.

It is true that in the past, the senior political leadership of the two countries interacted sparingly; however, the recent visit of the Foreign Minister of Ukraine to Pakistan and the participation of Pakistan's First Lady in the 3rd Kyiv Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen held in Kyiv corroborates positive trajectory in our diplomatic relations. You will agree with me that there is a huge potential for enhanced cooperation in multiple areas between our two friendly countries, which we shall exploit together for our collective benefit as I consider Ukraine to be my second country indeed.

— *Please summarise the priorities you set before yourself and the Embassy when you first arrived.*

— I joined the Embassy in Kyiv during the ongoing war in June 2023. Therefore, besides other priorities I had set for myself and the Embassy, the main focus was to facilitate all initiatives for just and durable solutions for the return of peace in Ukraine. This is in the context of Pakistan as a country that has seen and suffered the consequences of prolonged conflict in our neighbourhood.

The other areas of my emphasis include enhancement in cooperation, especially in bilateral trade, education, interaction of our senior leadership, defence and information technology, and cultural exchanges / tourism between the two countries.



Розмова Посла Надіра Хана з Президентом Володимиром Зеленським

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy briefing Ambassador Nadir Khan

— *Was there a tangible uplift in our countries' relations after Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba visited Islamabad in July 2023?*

— Yes, certainly! In fact, the visit of the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Mr Dmytro Kuleba, along with his delegation, set the stage for taking our ongoing cooperation up to a new enhanced level. He also had the opportunity to meet our Prime Minister and visit several other organisations. The visit was very well received in both countries. I am certain that both countries have great scope for cooperation in many fields, and there is a huge potential which is yet to be exploited for the benefit of both friendly countries. I am sure that in the coming years, we will see a definite improvement and positive trajectory in our bilateral cooperation.

— *Ukrainian and Pakistani military industries have traditionally enjoyed close ties. How has the war changed the dynamics of our cooperation in this regard, especially considering Pakistan's neutrality towards the war?*

— Ukraine and Pakistani military industries have a history of cooperation and collaboration. I believe it is fair to say that the defence cooperation between the two countries has been the hallmark of our bilateral relations. In my opinion, the war hasn't changed the dynamics of our cooperation, even with Pakistan maintaining positive neutrality towards the war. If you recall, Pakistan has always supported the UN Resolutions, calling for respect for the principle of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of states. We understand that every country must first pay attention to its own immediate needs, especially when it comes to

the need related to defence equipment. If we talk about Ukraine, its primary focus during these challenging times is understandably on its own defence needs. This circumstance, to some extent, might have affected some flow of already contracted equipment; however, I must acknowledge and appreciate that after my meeting with the senior Ukrainian leadership, Pakistan, being an old partner, was given necessary waivers/exemptions by the Ukrainian Government from the ban imposed on the export of equipment. To summarise, I would say that despite the ongoing war, the cooperation between the two countries continues in a positive direction without any problem.



2 травня 2024 року Посол Надір Хан зустрівся з першим заступником Міністра закордонних справ України Андрієм Сибігою

On 2 May 2024, Ambassador Nadir Khan met with Andrii Sybiha, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

— *At the start of your tenure as Ambassador of Pakistan to Ukraine, you announced your intention to identify business opportunities for Pakistan in Ukraine. What is your current assessment of such opportunities?*

— I am of firm belief that Ukraine and Pakistan have a lot of potential to take our bilateral trade to a significantly enhanced level. You will agree that, as of now, the prevalent environment does not allow routine B2B contacts / visits of the business community and other stakeholders primarily due to the absence of an air link and the availability of a limited mode of travel. Nonetheless, I have identified some of the business opportunities / areas of interest for possible export from Pakistan, which include textile, garments, leather goods, surgical instruments, medicines, basmati rice, fresh fruits, etc., whereas Pakistan's business community may find attraction in import of steel, machinery, electronic items, sunflower, wheat, petroleum products. Pakistan is a regular consumer of grain and sunflower oil imported from Ukraine. Although the blockade / restricted movement from the Black Sea and the other routes have affected the trade to some extent, I am sure this restriction will soon be lifted, allowing unrestricted flow of trade through the Black Sea. In addition, I would also like to highlight that besides the import and export of items mentioned, there is a huge scope of cooperation between Ukraine and Pakistan in the IT sector.

— *Could you tell us more about the potential cooperation in the IT sector you mentioned?*

— Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world with a bulk of youth in its population, i.e., 64% of the total population is below the age of 30. Therefore, our youth can be really productive if incorporated into the IT industry. The application of IT is now in every field. We see potential for cooperation in

agriculture, defence, aircraft industries, education and so on. We still have vast swathes of land that need to be developed, and we can make use of Ukraine's expertise. There is no limit to this; you will find opportunities to apply such technologies in many fields.

— *In 2022, shortly after the start of the full-scale invasion, Pakistan dispatched several aircraft with humanitarian aid to Ukraine. We are grateful for that, especially considering that soon afterwards, your country unfortunately faced one of the worst floods in its history. Do you think there is potential for bilateral humanitarian cooperation between our countries in the near future?*

— When it comes to good friends, a friend in need is a friend indeed. In fact, the good thing is that the people of both countries feel good about each other, and we have been there to help each other during such times of need in the past as well. It's not just Pakistan; Ukraine has also helped us when we needed it during our floods, earthquakes, and other occasions. That is also why we feel very strongly about our friend being in need and understand that there must be help. Once the war had started, we dispatched several flights with humanitarian aid, and more were planned, but then, as you mentioned, we experienced unfortunate, unprecedented floods that weren't caused by the overflow of rivers but by colossal rainfall. It was a kind of catastrophe that badly impacted our country's state of affairs. Tens of billions of dollars were needed to mitigate the effects of the floods. However, in early 2024, I visited Pakistan and discussed this subject with concerned quarters. We were considering different options for how best we could still help our brotherly, friendly people of Ukraine. Despite our own challenges and issues, I'm sure this cooperation and gestures will continue.

— *Your Embassy has been actively cooperating with Ukrainian universities, particularly to facilitate the return of Pakistani students who were forced to leave Ukraine because of the war. Could you tell us about your plans regarding the education sphere?*

— I consider this one of the priority works for me as it is something we can work on in the present situation. When the war started, we had a sizeable community of students in Ukraine. I believe 2,100 or more of our students were here. Most of them had to leave the country at the beginning of this unfortunate war. Those who could get permission went to other countries, while others returned to Pakistan. Many of them started with online studies from the place of their residence. However, as of today, some of the students who moved to Pakistan because of the war now want to come back to Ukraine to resume their offline studies, mostly the medical students. I am in contact with the universities and other relevant authorities to address their issues of transfer from one university to another where required, as well as the issuance of the visa of Ukraine and transit visas of third countries needed to arrive in Ukraine. In the case of universities in active war zones, we are engaged with them to transfer the students

to universities located in the westward part of the country. I must acknowledge and appreciate the consent and assurance of facilitation given by the Rectors of the Vinnytsia, Ternopil, and Kharkiv Medical Universities.

— *Considering your great interest in cooperating with Ukrainian universities, including the ones close to the frontline, is Pakistan considering assisting Ukraine with the reconstruction of war-afflicted universities?*

— I am sure that once engaged, Pakistan will be looking to extend all kinds of cooperation as far as the reconstruction of universities is concerned. The same goes for other areas, which may include humanitarian assistance and the provision of a skilled workforce. Whenever and wherever possible, we would like to help a friendly country in every feasible way. Secondly, we are also currently looking to enhance the ties between Ukrainian and Pakistani universities. In this context, I have already visited many universities, and we are now at a fairly advanced stage of cooperation and signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between them. This includes Kyiv National Linguistic University and Ihor Sikorskyi Polytechnic Institute, with our National University of Modern Languages and National University of Science and Technology, which are both in our capital Islamabad.

— *What is the overall state of the Pakistani community in Ukraine? In what other ways does the Embassy interact with local Pakistanis?*

— Before the war, the overall state of the Pakistani community in Ukraine totalled approximately 4,000 individuals. Besides, a sizeable strength of students from Pakistan were also studying in Ukraine. At the beginning of the war, most of the students were asked to leave the country. Likewise, Pakistani community members had also left the country, especially those residing in active war zones. We are trying to reconnect with all members of the Pakistani community through social media and at events arranged by the Embassy on our national days. I am sure that out of those who have left the country, most will return to Ukraine as soon as the situation improves.

— *We would also like to know more about the Embassy's interactions with the broader Ukrainian Muslim population.*

— I am happy to inform you that we have a very nice Islamic Cultural Centre in Kyiv where we mostly attend the prayers every Friday. It's a place which provides an opportunity to interact with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Not only do we interact and share views, but we also get the opportunity to know the Muslim community of Ukraine. I must mention here that the Crimean Tatars are great people with a great history, and they rightly feel very strongly about their areas, which are now under occupation. Whatever interactions we had, I found them to be loyal citizens, a solid segment of Ukrainian society. I was pleased to see that even the imam of the mosque in the Islamic centre volunteered to fight for Ukraine on the battlefield. This kind of attitude speaks

very highly of those people. Although Muslims only make up about 1% of the population of Ukraine, we saw an excellent environment here, a very cordial relationship with many humanitarian programmes organised in support of the State and the Armed Forces.

— *Does the Embassy of Pakistan have plans to expand its public diplomacy activities?*

— That would be a great thing to do, and it's a part of our overall plans, but I must admit that this is something which has been slowed down and hampered because of the war, as most of such things were related to universities where our students were studying. For instance, we were planning to establish Pakistan corners in different universities. We also had a plan regarding Muhammad Asad, a famous person from Lviv. There is already an Islamic Cultural Centre in Lviv named after Mr Asad. We were planning to process communication with Lviv authorities to name a street after him. We also wanted to establish a corner in the local botanical garden where we'd place certain plants donated from Pakistan. As you can see, there were multiple programmes, and I'm sure that with the passage of time, they will regain momentum, and we will try to complete at least some of them in the near future.

— *What is your overall opinion of Ukraine as a country? Could you tell us about your favourite experiences with Ukrainian cities, people, and culture and whether you find there are certain things our countries share in this sense?*

— I would like to visit every part of Ukraine! I enjoy travelling and interacting with the people. Since my arrival, I've been to many oblasts/cities, including Odesa, Kharkiv, Lviv, Vinnytsia, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, and Cherkasy. One thing I need to mention here is that I love the kind of attitude displayed by the Ukrainian people towards Pakistan, and I could see the warmth felt by the population. Whenever I visited, the people welcomed us, and whatever exchanges we had were all heartening.

The second thing I would like to mention is that it's great to see that the population is in high morale; they believe in their success and victory in war. I see the people's firm cohesion, which is growing every passing day towards patriotism and Ukrainian integrity, and that's a very positive thing.

Our countries have a lot of similarities. Interestingly, we are both predominantly agricultural countries and both countries are strategically located in extremely important regions. We have always faced difficulties in balancing relations with our eastern neighbour. We both have internationalised issues of illegally occupied territories by our neighbours, and these disputes have yet to be resolved. The good thing is the people of both countries feel so good and positive about each other. I feel confident saying that you don't feel much of a change when you come to Ukraine other than the change in weather due to extreme winters.

— *Having visited different parts of Ukraine, you must have learned a lot of new things about our country. Is there something you wish more Ukrainians knew about Pakistan?*

— Of course. I think very few people have travelled to Pakistan, and I would like more of you to visit us. Ukraine is a beautiful country, and there is no doubt about it. However, one thing you might not find here is that Pakistan is a country that starts at sea level in the South and gradually goes through green areas, vast patches of desert, fertile plains along rivers, hilly terrain, and low green hills before finally reaching mountains — the highest mountain ranges in the world. It's one country that can offer all kinds of geography, and you can travel across it for two weeks all alone, experience the hospitality of the people towards the visitors, and finally reach the unique mountains and see the world's second-highest peak — K2 in Karakoram. Despite the war, I can share that still people from Ukraine are travelling to Pakistan — I keep receiving requests for the issuance of visas. Most applicants are female since the war requires the men to stay, except for those few who are allowed to go. Still, people visit us, and many who return maintain contact with us and appreciate our country. Another good thing is that it's economical as you don't have to spend much to visit Pakistan.

— *Would you like to make some final remarks about Ukrainian-Pakistani relations?*

— Let me share with you that before my arrival, I had a slightly different perception of Ukraine as a country in the middle of a war. However, on my arrival in Ukraine in June 2023, I had the opportunity to meet Mr President Zelenskyy and other officials, and in parallel, I moved around to see different parts of the country and its cities, interacting with different elements of the society and officials. This experience provided me with a real understanding of the environment. I realised that I am in a country that is fully functional, with its organisational structure effectively performing despite the ongoing war. The people I interacted with were found resilient, radiating confidence and conviction in their victory. I strongly believe peace should return to Ukraine as early as possible. The people of Ukraine are great people who deserve peace and security. Pakistan wishes Ukraine a very successful and bright future. The people of Pakistan feel very good about Ukraine, and our countries have a lot of potential to take our cooperation to the next level.