

CAPS AMBASSADORS' FORUM

Developing P2P and B2B Linkages between Pakistan and Asia Pacific

(Australia & South Korea)

Event Date: February 24, 2025

Venue: National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad

Time: 14:00-16:00

Moderator: Dr. Gulshan Rafiq, Chief Organizer CAPS

Executive Summary

The Consortium for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) successfully hosted the "CAPS Ambassadors' Forum," bringing together distinguished diplomats, industry leaders, and academic experts to explore innovative avenues for people-to-people (P2P) and business-to-business (B2B) cooperation between Pakistan and Asia Pacific nations. The forum specifically focused on Pakistan's relations with Australia and South Korea, highlighting historical connections, current challenges, and future opportunities for collaboration across various sectors including education, tourism, and trade.

The discussions emphasized the need for Pakistan to diversify its engagement with the Asia-Pacific region beyond high politics, with a greater focus on developing sustainable P2P and B2B linkages. Multiple speakers highlighted untapped potential in educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, tourism development, and technological collaboration, while also addressing the bureaucratic and geopolitical challenges that have hindered deeper engagement.



Introduction and Opening Remarks

Dr. Khurram Iqbal, President of CAPS, opened the forum by explaining that Pakistan’s engagement with Asia-Pacific has historically focused on a few countries and mostly on high politics. CAPS was launched to broaden the discourse, emphasizing low politics through people-to-people (P2P) and business-to-business (B2B) cooperation. He noted longstanding but underutilized ties with South Korea and Australia and introduced the Ambassadors' Forum as the first of many initiatives to engage with the region more comprehensively.

Session 1: Pakistan-Australia Relations

Presentation by Ambassador Naela Chohan

“P2P and B2B Cooperation between Pakistan and Australia: Opportunities and Challenges”

Ambassador Chohan traced historical milestones such as:

- Pakistani Cameleers’ Contribution to develop Outback Australia
- Australian officers at Quetta Staff College (1909)
- Pakistan's first diplomatic mission in Australia (1948)
- Australia's contribution to UNMOGIP in Kashmir (1950–1985)
- Collaboration among think tanks and academics

She acknowledged fluctuations post-9/11 due to Australia's military engagement in Afghanistan. Defense ties have persisted through annual dialogues and Track 1.5 discussions.

Educational Cooperation

Education was identified as a critical but underutilized sector. Ambassador Chohan had proposed student exchange programs with Go8 universities and drafted an MOU, but the initiative stalled. She urged progress, noting the economic potential and complementarity between institutions like NUST and Australian universities. Joint efforts on issues such as trafficking and academic collaboration through think tanks were encouraged.

Trade Relations

Despite bureaucratic hurdles and federal regulatory diversity in Australia, bilateral trade reached A\$3.3 billion in 2023. Key exports from Australia include pulses, coal, and fertilizer; from Pakistan: textiles and clothing. Sectors for future growth include:

- Agribusiness
- Processed foods
- Water management
- Sustainable mining

Agricultural Cooperation

She highlighted partnerships with ACIAR and NARC on sustainable agriculture and water management. This cooperation showcases how Australian expertise contributes to Pakistani food security.

Geopolitical Considerations

Australia's alignment with the US and its participation in the QUAD complicates relations with Pakistan. Concerns also arose over the perceived politicization of FATF actions against Pakistan, despite Australia's initial support.

Discussion by Michael Barnes, CEO IAE Global
Mr. Barnes, reflecting on 25 years of engagement, praised Pakistani students and educators. He emphasized Transnational Education (TNE) as the next big frontier, with offshore campuses and partnerships poised for growth. Despite challenges in visa and business procedures, he foresaw renewed

interest in Pakistani students as Australian universities seek new revenue streams. He stressed the need for diplomatic efforts to promote education as a shared national interest.

Session 2: Pakistan-South Korea Relations

Presentation by Ambassador Masood Khalid

“P2P and B2B Cooperation between Pakistan and Republic of Korea: Opportunities and Challenges”

Ambassador Masood recounted the transformation of South Korea from a low-income country to a global tech and economic power, citing:

- GDP growth from \$2.7 billion (1962) to \$1.87 trillion today
- 4.9% of GDP spent on R&D
- \$683 billion in exports

South Korea had once studied Pakistan’s development model. Diplomatic ties were upgraded in 1983, leading to cooperation in:

- Trade and development assistance
- Defense (MOU signed in 2022)
- Infrastructure (Daewoo’s major projects)
- Education and employment exchange

Economic Relations

Trade stands at \$1.3 billion but is heavily tilted in Korea’s favor. Pakistani exports include raw materials, while imports are high-tech goods. Korean investment declined to \$6 million in 2023 due to COVID-19 and perceived investment risks. Nonetheless, major Korean firms like Hyundai and Kia remain active in Pakistan.

Through the Korean Employment Permit System, 1,600 skilled Pakistani workers were placed in Korea in 2023. The ambassador emphasized enhancing vocational training for skilled labor exports.

South Korea's positive response to Pakistan's 2005 earthquake and the establishment of a Korean university in Rawalpindi show deepening societal ties.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Ambassador Masood outlined six key sectors:

1. **Trade and Investment** – Market research and improved marketing needed.
2. **Education and Research** – Korean scholarships are increasing; potential for research collaboration.
3. **Manpower Export** – Skill development critical to meet Korean needs.
4. **Tourism** – Promote Gandhara heritage for Buddhist tourism.
5. **Rural Development** – Expand on “One Village One Product” model.
6. **Culture and Arts** – Promote cultural exchange and soft power initiatives.

Challenges

Two major barriers:

- Concerns over Pakistan's alleged proliferation to North Korea
- South Korea's strong alliance with the US, which influences its view of Pakistan's regional posture

Discussion by Dr. Bilal Zubair

Dr. Zubair emphasized the power of cultural diplomacy and Korea's growing global cultural influence. He encouraged Pakistan to capitalize on the Korean Wave and promote its own cultural assets. Key opportunities include:

- **Sports Diplomacy:** Expand Taekwondo exchanges and mutual sports interest.
- **Cultural Tourism:** Develop Gandhara heritage sites.
- **Creative Collaborations:** Utilize Korean expertise in media, music, and arts.

He suggested structured cultural exchanges through embassies, festivals, and youth programs to foster long-term mutual understanding.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Both sessions underscored that despite geographical distance, both Australia and South Korea offer tremendous opportunities for expanding P2P and B2B relations with Pakistan. CAPS intends to institutionalize such dialogues to build a nuanced and actionable Asia-Pacific policy, emphasizing education, trade, cultural diplomacy, and skilled workforce mobility. Addressing regulatory, structural, and geopolitical constraints through informed policymaking and targeted collaboration remains essential for sustainable engagement.