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## **Reflections on Sixty Years of Friendship between Pakistan and Hungary**

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Sixty years in international relations is not a long period. However, when it is characterized by growing exchanges, opening of new opportunities in trade, and mutual support at multilateral forums, the future looks promising.

Pakistan and Hungary established diplomatic relations on 26 November 1965, when Hungary was still part of the Communist bloc. Nevertheless, the contact between the people of the two countries predates the establishment of diplomatic ties.

In the modern times, the distant geography has not deterred both countries from strengthening ties in all areas. The bilateral relations got a boost when the Hungarian government under Prime Minister Viktor Orban announced Eastern Opening Policy, focusing on strengthening bilateral relations with the East. Pakistan benefitted from the Hungarian government's outreach to the East and since then, both the countries have witnessed uptick in the ties. Both the countries have signed a number of MoUs/Agreements institutionalizing cooperation between various departments.

At the political level, the Foreign Ministers from Pakistan and Hungary have paid visits to each other's capitals, leading to direct exchange of ideas. The ice broke with the visit of the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade to Pakistan in April 2021. In February 2023, the then Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto visited Hungary, which was the first ever visit from Pakistan at the Foreign Minister level. The Hungarian Foreign Minister led a strong business delegation again in April 2025. These visits have led to signing of a number of Agreements/MoUs in various areas.

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Another important area of cooperation is parliamentary exchanges, which provides opportunity to the parliamentarians to promote dialogue and mutual understanding between the legislative bodies of the two countries. In 2025, the Speaker of our National Assembly visited Hungary on the invitation of his Hungarian counterpart. Similarly, a Friendship Group also exists in the two parliaments reinforcing parliamentary dialogue.

Hungary's major trading partners are within the EU. However, bilateral trade is showing signs of improvement. In the last few years, the trade volume has risen from US\$65 million to US\$100 million in 2024-25. The major export item from Pakistan has been textile, followed by leather products. Other commodities are manufactured goods, crude machinery, agricultural products, medical instruments, and pink salt. Hungarian exports to Pakistan comprise of gas turbines, pharmaceutical products, chemicals, machinery and mechanical appliances. Although, statistically, bilateral volume of trade is modest, however, Pakistan's actual exports to Hungary are higher than the official figures because goods imported by large chain stores are custom cleared in other EU capitals and then sold in the Hungarian market.

Home to largest rivers in their regions (Danube largest in Central Europe; Indus in Pakistan), water is one of the most precious natural resources both countries have. Therefore, both countries cooperate in water management through sharing of ideas and innovative techniques.

Pakistan can benefit from Hungarian expertise in pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, water resource management, scientific agriculture, food processing, etc. Similarly, Hungary can benefit from Pakistan's agriculture sector through food processing and allied industries.

The most important factor in the economic ties is the presence of Hungarian oil and gas company MOL in Pakistan. MOL's subsidiary MOL Pakistan is operating in Pakistan since 1999. MOL Pakistan has undertaken joint ventures with the local exploration and production (E&P) companies. Currently MOL Pakistan is the Operator of the Tal block (Kohat, Karak, Hangu and some areas of North Waziristan and Orakzai agencies of FATA), Margalla and Margalla North blocks (areas of the federal capital and parts of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and it has participation in three blocks namely Karak, Ghauri and DG Khan. MOL celebrated 25 years of its operation in Pakistan in 2024, reflecting hydrocarbon sector's potential in Pakistan.

The Hungarian government launched scholarship program in 2013, offering educational opportunities to pursue higher studies in Hungarian universities. The degree programs are offered across all universities in Hungary in various disciplines at Bachelors, Masters and PhD levels. Pakistan became one of the major beneficiary of the program and Pakistani students have been travelling to Hungary to pursue higher education since 2017. At present, 400 scholarships are offered to Pakistani students annually, which is the highest number of scholarships offered to any country. It reflects deepening cooperation between the two countries in the education sector. Due to this cooperation in education sector, the size of Pakistani community also witnessed increase.

In today's world, cooperation at multilateral forums have achieved paramount importance. Both Pakistan and Hungary have been supporting each other's candidature at various international organizations. Pakistan was among those 50 countries who supported Hungary at the UN during November 1956 revolution. Hungary's support to continuation of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Pakistan is well known.

Hungary and Pakistan both have beautiful landscapes with tremendous tourist potential. Both Pakistan and Hungary can therefore establish a highly fruitful win-win cooperation in tourism sector through a futuristic approach.

The relations of Pakistan and Hungary are rooted in history. Both Pakistan and Hungary take pride in their respective historic roots, traditions, cultural and religious values, and unique socio-economic strengths. Like Pakistan, a strong family structure and respect for elders and women are inbuilt reflexes for most Hungarians.

They both occupy strategic economic locations in the fast-developing Eurasian cooperation and increasing interdependence especially in trade and technology transfer. While this part of Europe provides international quality technology at much affordable rates, Pakistan and its surrounds offer a huge market for the Hungarian and other companies to expand their businesses.