

## New Ambassadors

### **HE Nasrullah Khan, High Commissioner of Pakistan**

Based in Singapore since January 2016, His Excellency Nasrullah Khan looks forward to building a more robust trade and investment relationship with Singapore and highlighting Pakistan's cultural and touristic potential.



Please share with our readers something about your previous postings and your first impressions about Singapore.

My last posting before Singapore was Brazil and before that I have served in different missions in Europe and also in Iran.

Singapore was like a homecoming for me. The island, geographically and politically, is very close to Pakistan. We share some common things, such as being part of the Commonwealth, the English language and similar legal system. Besides, it's easier and quicker to return home as compared to Brazil, that's why I feel so at home here. It is a very comfortable and developed place. You have so many think-tanks and established institutions in Singapore. I feel, I have attended more seminars, conferences and exhibitions here in the past one year than during the last four years. I think the potential for capacity-building for a person working here, personally and professionally, is very great here.

### What are the main areas of engagement with Singapore?

My work involves enhancing the relations between our countries, be it political, economic or cultural. These are the areas we are working on. Our political relations with Singapore are excellent. We have full understanding and cooperation in the United Nations on the main issues of the international agenda.

### When did Pakistan establish diplomatic ties with Singapore?

We established ties in 1966 and we celebrated 50 years of diplomatic ties last year. One of the ways we did this was the issuance of joint postage stamps by Singaporean and Pakistani postal authorities; these were commemorative stamps of our national flowers: Jasmine for Pakistan and Vanda Miss Joaquim for Singapore.



There are some other events in the pipeline for this year as well including an art exhibition as well as a visit by a musical and cultural troupe from Pakistan. We hope to hold an exhibition on Buddhist artifacts as Pakistan is rich in Buddhist heritage. The ancient Gandhara Kingdom was a Buddhist civilisation and Pakistan was the heartland of that civilisation, so we want to bring some artifacts to be displayed at the National Museum of Singapore. The celebration of the diplomatic ties between the two nations is a year-long event, and the festivities will culminate in August 2017. I must also share that the founding Prime Minister of Singapore, late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, was held in high regard in Pakistan. He visited our country twice - in 1988 and 1992. The second time he spent almost a week in Pakistan.

### Could you comment on trade between Pakistan and Singapore as well as your views on potential investment opportunities?

In the context of our trade with Singapore, it is about US\$1.8 billion. Presently, there is still great scope for growth of investments for Singaporean companies in Pakistan. The economy of Pakistan has been growing steadily during the last several years, with a more than four per cent annual growth rate. Morgan Stanley and different institutions have categorised Pakistan's economy as a fully market economy.

Therefore, we would like Singapore to explore investment opportunities in Pakistan. I think there is a very conducive environment for foreign direct investments in Pakistan. We plan to hold seminars and conferences here in the coming months to network with Singaporean companies and invite them to visit Pakistan to see for themselves in which areas they can make investments.

#### [What are main industries has Pakistan engaged with Singapore?](#)

Our contribution to Singapore's maritime industry is very well known with quite a number of Pakistani shipping companies operating here. In the past, Pakistan International Airlines was initially helping Singapore Airlines during the latter's formative years after Singapore's independence in 1965.

#### [Can you give us an overview of Pakistan's relations with other countries in Asia and how Pakistan will engage with them in the coming years?](#)

Pakistan as an Asian country has strong historical relations with the countries in Asia, chief among which is China. China is an all-weather friend of Pakistan. The friendship between Pakistan and China is a model for other countries. There is complete trust between the two countries. The national interest of the two countries is absolutely compatible.

China is also investing heavily in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor under China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative. The agreement between the two nations was signed in 2013 and we have a strategic relationship with investments in the development of infrastructure and energy sectors. This is a major initiative for generating great economic activity and regional connectivity.

That is why I mentioned earlier that we want Singaporean companies to see for themselves what is happening in Pakistan and by extension, the potential in the China-Pakistan relationship, which Singapore can also contribute.

We have a policy of 'Vision East Asia' to enhance relations with ASEAN and East Asian countries. Pakistan is also a dialogue partner of ASEAN in eight sectors such as economy, culture and terrorism etc. We also have extensive multifaceted relations including trade relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, importing a lot of palm oil from them.

#### [Who are Pakistan's major trade and investment partners outside of Asia?](#)

Major trading partners and investors from outside Asia are from the EU nations such as UK, Germany, Italy and Belgium. Russia is another country with which relationship is on the upward trajectory. It had also established a steel producing facility at Karachi. Pakistan also has multifaceted relations with the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries as well as the Central Asian Republics.

#### [How is the Pakistani government interacting with the Asian region and Russia in regional security and fighting terrorism?](#)

Terrorism, as you know, is an international menace today. It is a big problem for the international community. Pakistan has been fighting this for over a decade now. In fact,

Pakistan's contribution in curbing this menace is a major one. We are co-operating with the entire world in this context. I think everyone acknowledges Pakistan's anti-terrorism role and contribution. Our armed forces are busy in the North West region of Pakistan, at the border with Afghanistan, against the Taliban in those high mountains, which even the British army found difficult to penetrate in the past.

[India in 2012 gave a 'Most Favourable Nation' \(MFN\) status to Pakistan and it has also removed restrictive investments from Pakistan. Please elaborate how this development can bring the India-Pakistan relations forward.](#)

Pakistan always wants normal relations with India. Our leadership is keen to promote good neighbourly relations with all our neighbours including India. So once the situation improves, there is huge potential in both trade and commercial activities.

[How closely are you working with your peers in the Diplomatic Corps here in Singapore?](#)

The Diplomatic Corps here is very well-knit. We meet on national days and receptions and other occasions as well. The think-tank community here is very active and invites ambassadors also to attend. Therefore, one can get to meet members of the Diplomatic Corps at these sessions as well. The Diplomatic Corps is very well informed. There's also a WhatsApp group established by Ambassador Jairo Hernandez of Costa Rica, the dean for the Diplomatic Corps in Singapore. So we are in touch with one another and also what's happening around us.

[How do you engage with the Pakistani community here in Singapore?](#)

There is an estimated 5,000 Pakistanis residing here in Singapore. But a majority of them have got Singapore nationality and hold Singaporean visas. According to our estimates, there are about 1,500 Pakistanis holding Pakistani passports here. We are in touch with them for special occasions like Independence Day celebrations (in August), National Day (in March) and the end of Ramadan Festival. I personally am in touch with about 40-50 Pakistanis here, including several prominent business leaders of Pakistani heritage such as the head of Meinhardt and Linkers Far East which are the Singapore's leading companies.

[If you are given an opportunity to replicate something of Singapore back in Pakistan, what would it be?](#)

Singapore is a model in many ways not just for Pakistan, but for many other countries as well. The good governance, the economic development, the transparency, the technological development, the institutional development, the investment environment and last but not the least the socio-cultural harmony of its people. They are all very forward looking, very advanced and very organised. All these need to be replicated by other countries.

[How do you spend your free time?](#)

I like to walk around the city. It's like a big garden. Incidentally, I also stay close to the beautiful Botanic Gardens, which is very conveniently located near Orchard Road and central to many parts of the city. My residence like many others here is close to everything – malls, cinema halls, restaurants, among other amenities

I also enjoy browsing in some of the bookshops here and am a member of a couple of gyms here. My wife and daughter live here with me while my son studies in Hong Kong (my daughter studies at a management university here). We go sightseeing whenever we are together as one family. We especially enjoy travelling on the open air bus tours of the city