



EMBASSY OF THE PHILIPPINES
ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN



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PHILIPPINES-PAKISTAN TRADE AND CULTURAL COOPERATION DISCUSSED IN COURTESY CALL OF UNITED BUSINESS GROUP (UBG) TO THE PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR

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ISLAMABAD, 21 May 2025—Ambassador Dr. Emmanuel R. Fernandez welcomed prominent representatives of Pakistan’s United Business Group (UBG) to the Philippine Embassy in Islamabad to explore enhanced avenues of economic, trade, and cultural cooperation between the Philippines and Pakistan.

The UBG delegation was led by Mr. Zafar Bakhtawari, UBG Secretary-General and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), accompanied by Mr. Ahsan Bakhtawari, former ICCI President, and Mr. Imran Minhas, member of the ICCI Executive Committee. Joining the meeting were Third Secretary Rain R. Mendoza and Mr. Shujaat Ali Umer of the Embassy’s Economic Affairs Section.

During the meeting, both sides expressed strong interest in deepening bilateral economic engagement. Ambassador Fernandez emphasized the Embassy’s commitment to rebalancing trade relations, noting that current trade figures heavily favor Pakistan, with Philippine exports to Pakistan significantly lagging behind. To address this disparity and boost commercial exchange, the parties discussed several key initiatives. These included exploring the possibility of establishing a direct flight route between the Philippines and Pakistan to facilitate trade and tourism. Additionally, both sides committed to assisting in connecting ICCI with its counterpart in Manila and to pave the way for a business delegation visit to the Philippines. Ambassador Fernandez and Mr. Zafar Bakhtawari also exchanged ideas on promoting joint ventures in the coconut industry, particularly by identifying Pakistani companies that currently import coconut products from the Philippines as potential partners.

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On the cultural and people-to-people diplomacy front, both parties explored ways to further promote mutual understanding and appreciation. They discussed organizing a cultural event or film screening at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), which would include performances, exhibits, and informational materials highlighting Philippine tourism and economic opportunities. The conversation also touched on the potential for literary and historical exchange, with mutual interest in translating the works of Philippine national hero José Rizal into Urdu, and introducing the writings of Pakistani national poet Allama Iqbal in the Philippines. These initiatives aim to deepen cultural ties and foster a greater sense of connection between the two countries through shared heritage and artistic expression.

In the broader context of diplomatic cooperation, the meeting also addressed the need to improve visa facilitation for Filipino professionals and tourists visiting Pakistan. Both sides acknowledged the importance of easing people-to-people exchanges as part of their efforts to enhance bilateral relations. Mr. Bakhtawari also expressed support for Pakistan's aspiration to become a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, a move that Ambassador Fernandez welcomed as a positive step toward expanding Pakistan's engagement with Southeast Asia.

The meeting concluded with both sides committing to sustained collaboration. The Philippine Embassy reaffirmed its dedication to promoting inclusive, mutually beneficial partnerships that strengthen the long-standing friendship between the peoples of Pakistan and the Philippines. END

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Ambassador Emmanuel R. Fernandez (center), accompanied by Third Secretary Rain R. Mendoza (left), is photographed with representatives of the United Business Group (UBG) during their courtesy call at the Philippine Embassy Chancery in Islamabad

