



THEME · DIPLOMACY & GEOPOLITICS

Pakistan and the Maldives at Sixty

Six decades of friendship, and what President Muizzu's
2026 state visit set in motion

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Pakistan and the Maldives at Sixty

Six decades of friendship, and what President Muizzu's 2026 state visit set in motion

By SAT Research Desk

ABOUT THIS BACKGROUNDER

Published to mark sixty years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the Maldives and the state visit of President Dr Mohamed Muizzu to Pakistan from 20 to 22 October 2026. It traces the shared heritage of the two nations, the growth of their relationship, what the visit agreed and how ties can be built at every level, from leaders and parliaments to students, scholars and citizens.

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ABOUT SAT BACKGROUNDERS

SAT Backgrounders are the explainer series of South Asia Times (SAT). Each one sets out, objectively and in plain language, the history, facts and institutions behind a defining relationship, treaty or concept in South Asia, so that diplomats, policymakers, journalists and students have a reliable reference point. Backgrounders are organised by SAT's editorial themes and are updated as events develop.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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OVERVIEW

At a Glance

KEY FACTS

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Established 26 July 1966, one year after Maldivian independence^[1]

MISSIONS

High Commission of Pakistan, Malé; High Commission of the Maldives, Islamabad (since 2008)^[1]

SHARED MEMBERSHIPS

United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)^[1]

TWO-WAY TRADE

About US\$13 million a year, with a shared goal of US\$200 million within two years^[2]

PRESIDENTIAL VISITS TO PAKISTAN

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; Abdulla Yameen (2015); Dr Mohamed Muizzu (2026)^[3]

LANDMARKS OF FRIENDSHIP

People's Majlis building (1998); the Maldives' first School of Medicine^[4,5]

QUESTIONS THIS BACKGROUNDER ANSWERS

- 01 What do the two nations share?
- 02 How did diplomatic ties begin?
- 03 What has sixty years produced?
- 04 What happened during the 2026 state visit?
- 05 What did the 20 memoranda of understanding (MoUs) cover?
- 06 How can ties be built at every level?

SIXTY YEARS IN FIVE MOMENTS

1966

Diplomatic relations established

1998

Pakistan-funded Parliament building opens in Malé

2004

Pakistan Navy rescues 367 tourists after the tsunami

2015

President Yameen's state visit

2026

President Muizzu's state visit; 20 MoUs

BOTTOM LINE

Pakistan and the Maldives share a faith, an ocean and six decades of goodwill. The October 2026 state visit gave that friendship its most ambitious agenda yet. Direct flights, a shipping link, a regular Joint Economic Commission (JEC) and wider people-to-people exchange can turn it into an enduring partnership.

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SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Pakistan and the Maldives have been friends since 1966, bound by faith, the Indian Ocean and a shared outlook in world affairs. President Dr Mohamed Muizzu's state visit of 20–22 October 2026, the first by a Maldivian president in eleven years, gave that friendship its broadest agenda yet.^[6]

60

years of diplomatic relations

20

MoUs exchanged on 21 October 2026

\$200m

trade goal within two years, up from about \$13m

20

additional scholarships a year for Maldivian students

Shared foundations

Relations date from 26 July 1966. Pakistan funded the People's Majlis building (1998), gifted the Maldives' first medical college and rescued 367 tourists after the 2004 tsunami.^[1,5,4]

A landmark visit

Talks with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, a state banquet hosted by President Asif Ali Zardari, a call by Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, an honorary doctorate and a Business Forum.^[2,7,8]

A broad agenda

Twenty MoUs spanning defence, maritime security, health, education, aviation, tourism, food, digital technology and culture; food and medicines on government-to-government terms; support for five million trees.^[2,9]

Connecting the two nations

Pakistan has ordered a study on direct flights, a Karachi/Gwadar–Malé shipping plan and a business delegation to Malé, turning goodwill into everyday links.^[10]

SAT RECOMMENDS

Build ties at every level: An air link and a sea link, a regular JEC, parliamentary and think-tank dialogue, student and youth exchange, and a sixtieth-anniversary programme celebrating the two nations' shared heritage.

PROFILES

Country Profiles

Two Muslim-majority republics of South Asia: one a continental nation of more than 240 million people, the other an ocean nation of some 1,200 coral islands. Their differences in size are a source of complementarity.

 Pakistan Islamic Republic of Pakistan 241.5 million people, 2023 census^[11] 796,096 km² land area ~US\$450 billion gross domestic product (GDP), 2026 International Monetary Fund (IMF) projection^[12] CAPITAL Islamabad INDEPENDENCE 14 August 1947 HEAD OF STATE President Asif Ali Zardari HEAD OF GOVERNMENT Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif FOREIGN MINISTER Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar LANGUAGES Urdu (national), English (official) CURRENCY Pakistani rupee (PKR) STATE RELIGION Islam ENVOY IN MALÉ High Commissioner Vice Admiral (Retd) Faisal Rasul Lodhi^[13]	 Maldives Republic of Maldives 515,132 people, 2022 census^[14] ~1,192 coral islands in 26 atolls; 187 inhabited^[14] ~US\$7.7 billion GDP, 2025 (119.4 billion Maldivian rufiyaa); tourism 20.3%^[15] CAPITAL Malé INDEPENDENCE 26 July 1965 (Republic since 1968) HEAD OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT President Dr Mohamed Muizzu VICE PRESIDENT Hussain Mohamed Latheef^[16] FOREIGN MINISTER Iruthisham Adam^[17] LANGUAGE Dhivehi CURRENCY Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR) STATE RELIGION Islam ENVOY IN ISLAMABAD High Commissioner Mohamed Thoha^[18]
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Sources: National statistics offices, government websites and the reports cited. GDP converted at about MVR 15.4 to the US dollar.

SECTION 01

Introduction

On 20 October 2026, President Dr Mohamed Muizzu landed at Islamabad International Airport to a 21-gun salute.^[19] With him were First Lady Sajidha Mohamed and a delegation of cabinet ministers and senior officials, including Foreign Minister Iruthisham Adam.^[20,17] Pakistan's Foreign Office described the visit, the first by a Maldivian president in eleven years, as one of special significance in the sixtieth year of diplomatic relations.^[6]

The friendship being celebrated is older than most of the institutions now charged with deepening it. It rests on a shared faith, centuries of Indian Ocean connection and six decades of steady support for one another in world forums. It has produced lasting landmarks, from the Parliament building in Malé to the Maldives' first medical school. The 2026 visit set out to add the everyday links of trade, travel and exchange.

THIS BACKGROUNDER EXPLAINS

01

Shared heritage

Faith, history, language and food that bind the two nations

02

Sixty years of ties

How relations began and the milestones since 1966

03

The state visit

The October 2026 programme, day by day

04

What was agreed

Twenty MoUs and the commitments around them

05

Ties at every level

Cooperation today and SAT's recommendations



PHOTO 1 President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and First Lady Sajidha Mohamed arrive at Islamabad International Airport, 20 October 2026.
Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 2 President Muizzu walks past a naval guard of honour on arrival.
Photo: Official handout

SECTION 02

Shared Heritage: Faith, History and Culture

Long before the two states established relations, the peoples of the Indus valley and the Maldivian atolls were part of the same Indian Ocean world: linked by monsoon winds, merchants, scholars and faith. These connections give the modern relationship a warmth that statistics alone do not capture.

2.1 One faith across the ocean

Islam reached the Maldives in 1153, when the last Buddhist king embraced the faith; tradition credits a visiting Muslim scholar, Abu al-Barakat Yusuf al-Barbari, with the conversion.^[21] Islam is the state religion of both countries today. Their calendars move to the same rhythm of Ramadan, the two Eids and the Hajj season, and both look to the OIC as a forum for the wider Muslim world. It was fitting that the International Islamic University, Islamabad, chose the 2026 visit to confer an honorary doctorate on President Muizzu.^[22]

2.2 Travellers and traders of the Indian Ocean

The great fourteenth-century traveller Ibn Battuta crossed the Indus in September 1333 on his way to Delhi, and later lived in the Maldives in the early 1340s.^[23] His journey is a reminder that the lands of today's Pakistan and the Maldives once sat on the same routes of scholarship and commerce. Maldivian cowrie shells circulated as money across South Asia and far beyond for centuries, making the atolls one of the earliest suppliers of currency to the region.^[24]

2.3 Languages and letters

Urdu and Dhivehi both belong to the Indo-Aryan family of languages, and both draw on a rich store of Arabic and Persian vocabulary. Both are written from right to left. Thaana, the Dhivehi script, combines letters derived from numerals with Arabic vowel marks; its oldest dated inscription is from 1599.^[25] A Pakistani visitor to Malé will recognise many everyday words of faith, law and hospitality.

2.4 At the table

Food tells a similar story. Rice and curries are staples in both countries. Maldivian *roshi*, a thin flatbread eaten with fish curry or the coconut-and-tuna breakfast dish *mas huni*, is a close cousin of the Pakistani *roti*. Tea, served with sweet and savoury snacks, is as central to hospitality in Malé as *chai* is in Lahore, Karachi or Peshawar.

2.5 A shared modern journey

Both nations emerged from British-era arrangements: Pakistan at independence in 1947 and the Maldives, a British protectorate, in 1965. The Maldives had briefly become a republic in 1953 under President Mohamed Amin Didi, and proclaimed its Second Republic in 1968. Both are members of the Commonwealth today, and both were founding members of SAARC in 1985. That shared modern journey shaped a common outlook on sovereignty, development and the rights of small and developing states.

Figure 1. Six threads that bind the two nations

Faith Islam is the state religion of both; Ramadan, Eid and Hajj shared	Ocean Linked for centuries by monsoon trade across the Arabian Sea	Language Urdu and Dhivehi: Indo-Aryan tongues, written right to left
Table Rice, curries, flatbread and tea as the language of hospitality	Commonwealth Both emerged from British-era rule; both are Commonwealth members	World voice Close coordination at the UN, OIC and SAARC

Source: SAT Research Desk.

THE SAT TAKEAWAY

Friends by faith, neighbours by the ocean, partners by choice.

SECTION 03

Diplomatic Foundations

3.1 A friendship as old as Maldivian statehood

The Maldives became independent on 26 July 1965. Exactly one year later, on 26 July 1966, it established diplomatic relations with Pakistan.^[4] The Maldivian President's Office has described Pakistan as one of the first countries to recognise the Maldives as an independent nation.^[26]



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Pakistan was among the first countries to recognise the Maldives after independence in 1965, and the two established relations exactly a year later.

PHOTO 3 Mohamed Amin Didi, President of the first Maldivian Republic (1953).

Photo: File photo

PHOTO 4 Archival photograph from the year of Maldivian independence, 1965.

Photo: File photo

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the relationship as one of common faith, shared interests, mutual respect and trust, and notes that the two countries usually take coordinated positions at the UN, the OIC and SAARC.^[5] The Maldivian side lists sustainable development, climate change, multilateralism and countering terrorism among the issues on which the two see eye to eye.^[1]

3.2 Missions and envoys

Habib Bank Limited (HBL) has served customers in the Maldives since 1976, one of Pakistan's earliest institutional footprints in Malé.^[5] The Maldives opened its first resident mission in Islamabad on 31 July 2008,^[4] and its High Commission includes a Defence Adviser.^[18] Today Vice Admiral (Retd) Faisal Rasul Lodhi represents Pakistan in Malé, and High Commissioner Mohamed Thoha represents the Maldives in Islamabad.^[13,18]



PHOTO 5 Habib Bank Limited's Malé branch; HBL has served the Maldives since 1976.

Photo: File photo



PHOTO 6 Pakistan's High Commissioner presents his credentials to President Muizzu in Malé.

Photo: File photo

3.3 From goodwill to connectivity

Economic ties have long been shaped by geography. Trade in 2003–04 was about US\$2.1 million, and the two countries set up a JEC in October 2005 to expand it.^[27] In October 2026, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif identified direct shipping and direct flights as the keys to unlocking the relationship's economic potential.^[10] The opportunity the two countries recognised two decades ago is now at the centre of their agenda. The decade between the two most recent presidential visits, in May 2015 and October 2026, frames this shift (Photos 7 and 8).



PHOTO 7 May 2015: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Abdulla Yameen hold official talks in Islamabad, during the last Maldivian presidential visit before 2026.

Photo: Official handout

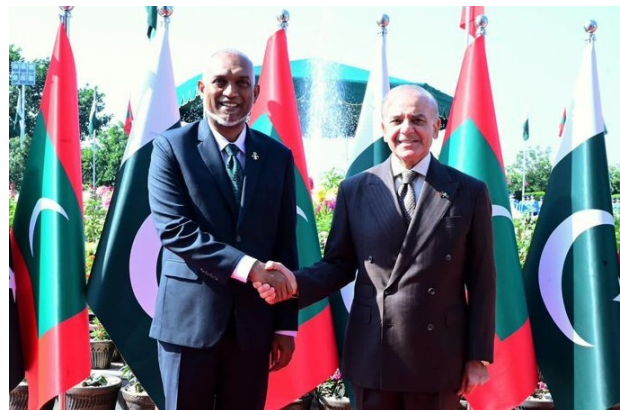


PHOTO 8 October 2026: President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister's House, Islamabad.

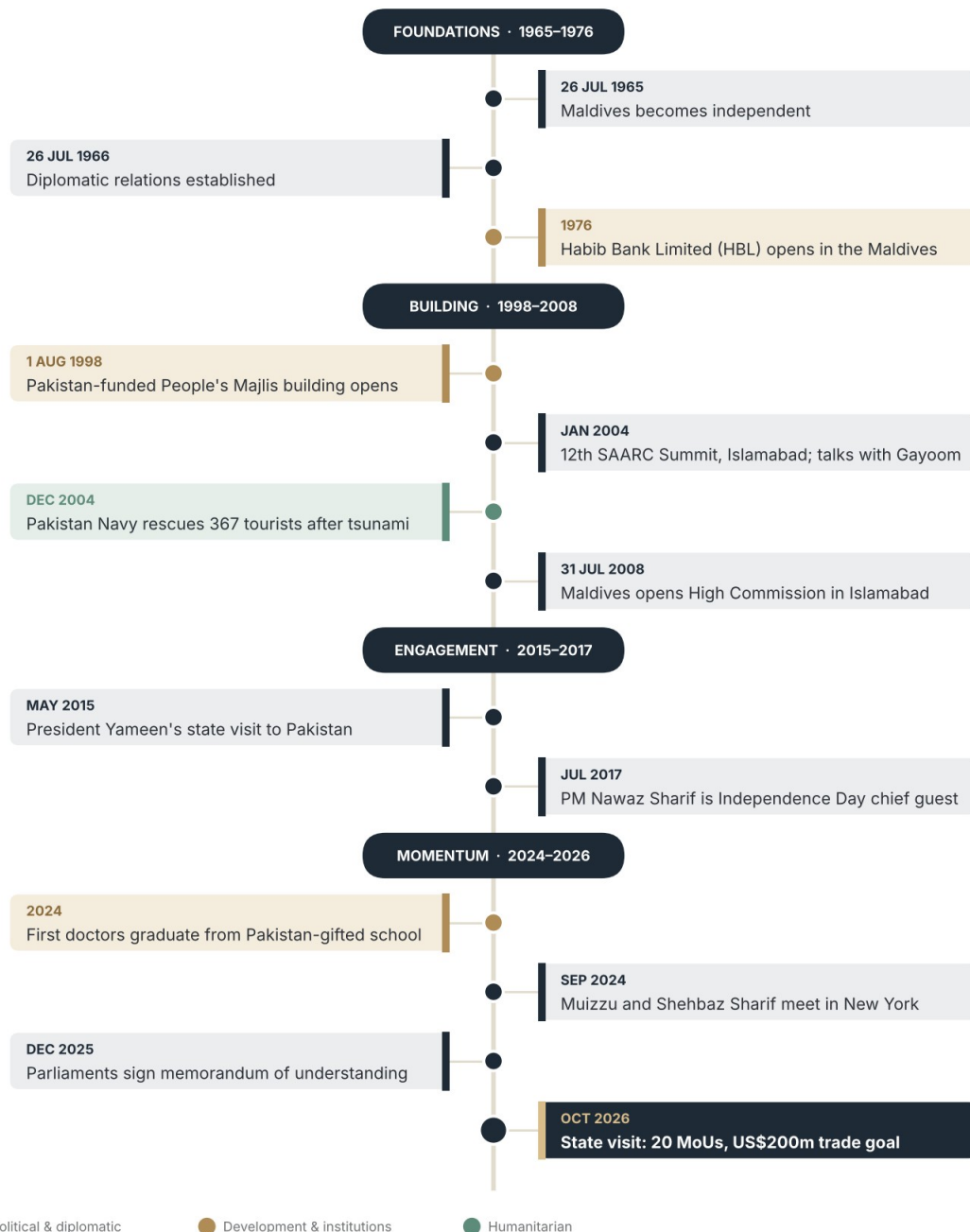
Photo: Official handout

SECTION 04

Sixty Years in Milestones

Figure 2. Sixty years of Pakistan–Maldives relations

Selected milestones, 1965–2026



Source: SAT Research Desk, from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the Maldives, the People's Majlis, the Maldivian President's Office and Radio Pakistan (see endnotes).

4.1 Landmarks of friendship

The People's Majlis building. The Maldivian Parliament meets in a building constructed with a grant from the Government of Pakistan and inaugurated on 1 August 1998 by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.^[4] Pakistan's Foreign Ministry calls it a living monument of friendship,^[5] and Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla described it in December 2025 as a symbol of the two countries' long-standing ties.^[28]

The School of Medicine. The Maldives' first medical college was a gift from Pakistan; its first students completed their Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degrees in 2024.^[5] One of the 2026 MoUs provides for the construction of a medical school in the Maldives.^[29]

The 2004 tsunami. When the Indian Ocean tsunami struck in December 2004, Pakistan Navy ships rescued 367 tourists from remote islands and delivered humanitarian aid. The Maldivian President conferred the country's highest award on the mission commander.^[5]



PHOTO 9 The People's Majlis building in Malé, built with a Pakistani grant and inaugurated on 1 August 1998.
Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 10 A Maldivian Ministry of Health briefing on the medical college project.
Photo: Maldives Independent (file)



PHOTO 11 A Pakistan Navy officer receives a Maldivian honour.
Photo: File photo

4.2 High-level exchanges

Table 1. High-level exchanges

Date	Exchange	Note
Gayoom presidency (1978–2008)	President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom visits Pakistan	First Maldivian presidential visit ^[3]
Jan 2004	Gayoom attends the 12th SAARC Summit, Islamabad	Bilateral meetings with Pakistan's President and Prime Minister ^[27]
Nov 2004	Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz visits Malé	Offers credit, scholarships and training ^[27]
6–7 May 2015	President Abdulla Yameen's state visit to Pakistan	Agreements on sports, health, education and counter-narcotics ^[30,31]

Date	Exchange	Note
27–29 Jan 2016	Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon visits Islamabad	Carries a message from President Yameen ^[32]
25–27 Jul 2017	Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visits Malé	Chief guest at the 52nd Independence Day ^[31,33]
17 Nov 2018	Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani in Malé	Attends the presidential inauguration ^[31]
24 Sep 2024	Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meets President Muizzu	UN General Assembly, New York ^[34]
Nov 2024	Maldivian Defence Minister meets Pakistan's Army Chief	International Defence Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS), Karachi ^[35]
Oct 2025	Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee visits Malé	General Sahir Shamshad Mirza meets President Muizzu ^[36]
Dec 2025	National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq visits Malé	MoU between the two parliaments ^[28]
Sep 2026	People's Majlis Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla visits Pakistan	Five-day visit; calls on Field Marshal Asim Munir ^[37,38]
20–23 Oct 2026	President Muizzu's state visit to Pakistan	20 MoUs; US\$200 million trade goal ^[2,39]

Source: SAT Research Desk, from the sources cited in each row.

4.3 Momentum since 2023

Engagement has quickened since President Muizzu took office in November 2023. Pakistan's then Information Minister Murtaza Solangi extended an early invitation to visit.^[40] In September 2024 the President and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met in New York: the Prime Minister praised the Maldives' success in tourism and spoke of learning from it, and the President discussed Pakistani support for his Five Million Tree project.^[41,42]

Defence and parliamentary contacts followed. Maldivian Defence Minister Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon met Pakistan's Army Chief in Karachi in November 2024;^[35] General Sahir Shamshad Mirza called on President Muizzu in Malé in October 2025;^[36] and the two parliaments exchanged Speaker-level visits in December 2025 and September 2026.^[28,37]

SECTION 05

The State Visit of October 2026

The visit ran from 20 to 22 October at the invitation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, with President Muizzu departing Islamabad on 23 October.^[6,39] Its programme combined ceremony, leaders' talks, defence and academic engagements and a business forum.

5.1 Day by day

Table 2. Programme of the state visit

Date	Engagements
Tue 20 Oct	Arrival at Islamabad International Airport; 21-gun salute. ^[19]
Wed 21 Oct	Official welcome at the Prime Minister's House: Tri-service guard of honour, national anthems and a commemorative sapling.^[43,2] Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar calls on the President.^[44] Restricted and delegation-level talks; exchange of 20 MoUs; joint press stakeout; luncheon hosted by the Prime Minister.^[2] The International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) confers an honorary PhD in Politics and International Relations.^[2,22] Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, calls on the President.^[8] Meeting with President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr and a state banquet; First Lady Sajidha Mohamed meets First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari.^[7,3,45]
Thu 22 Oct	Pakistan–Maldives Business Forum, opened by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.^[10] A meeting with Maldivian families living in Pakistan was also on the programme.^[29]
During the visit	The President and First Lady visit the Pakistan Monument and Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage.^[46] The First Lady visits the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) and the National Institute of Health (NIH).^[45]
Fri 23 Oct	President Muizzu departs Islamabad. ^[39]

Source: SAT Research Desk, from Radio Pakistan, *The Edition* and posts by the President and First Lady of the Maldives on X.



PHOTO 12 Pakistani dignitaries welcome President Muizzu at the aircraft.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 13 First Lady Sajidha Mohamed is warmly received in Islamabad.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 14 The official welcome at the Prime Minister's House, 21 October 2026.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 15 President Muizzu inspects the tri-service guard of honour.

Photo: Official handout

5.2 What the leaders said

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the talks covered economic and trade relations, strategic defence cooperation and training for Maldivian nationals, and that the visit would take the relationship to a stronger, broader and more substantive level.^[9] President Muizzu called Pakistan a trusted friend of sixty years and said the two countries had agreed to open a new era of partnership that is broader, more dynamic and of direct benefit to their peoples.^[9] He welcomed the agreement to resume direct air services and discussed the development of halal tourism.^[47]



PHOTO 16 Restricted talks between the two leaders, 21 October 2026.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 17 Delegation-level talks at the Prime Minister's House.

Photo: Official handout

President Zardari called for political goodwill to be turned into trade, investment, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges. He recalled Pakistan's role in building the Parliament and the School of Medicine in Malé, and offered cooperation on climate resilience, including support for the Five Million Tree Initiative.^[7] In his meeting with Field Marshal Asim Munir, President Muizzu commended the professionalism of Pakistan's armed forces, and both sides stressed defence cooperation, institutional linkages and professional exchanges.^[8]

The leaders also reviewed regional and international developments. Both expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine.^[9,7] President Muizzu reiterated his support for reviving SAARC,^[48] a goal Pakistan shares, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif shared Pakistan's perspective on Jammu and Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty.^[9]



PHOTO 18 President Asif Ali Zardari receives President Muizzu at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 19 Talks at Aiwan-e-Sadr ahead of the state banquet.

Photo: Official handout

5.3 Honours, heritage and health

The visit reached well beyond the conference room. The International Islamic University, Islamabad, conferred an honorary doctorate in Politics and International Relations on President Muizzu in recognition of his leadership, public service and contribution to the development of the Maldives.^[2,22]

The President and First Lady toured Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, exploring Pakistan's traditional arts and diverse cultural expressions, and visited the Pakistan Monument, learning about its significance as a symbol of the nation's unity, history and heritage.^[46]



PHOTO 20 The President and First Lady at the Pakistan Monument, Islamabad.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 21 Touring Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 22 Traditional crafts on display at Lok Virsa.

Photo: Official handout

First Lady Sajidha Mohamed visited the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), where she learned about its regulatory framework and Pakistan's pharmaceutical regulatory system, and the National Institute of Health (NIH), one of Pakistan's principal federal public-health institutions, gaining insights into its work in public health and healthcare research.^[45] Her visits complement the health and pharmaceutical cooperation agreed during the visit.



PHOTO 23 First Lady Sajidha Mohamed at the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP).

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 24 The First Lady with DRAP officials and the Maldivian delegation.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 25 The First Lady is welcomed at the National Institute of Health (NIH), Islamabad.

Photo: Official handout

SECTION 06

What Was Agreed

6.1 The twenty MoUs

The two leaders witnessed the exchange of 20 MoUs on 21 October. They cover information technology, health, education, social protection, defence, maritime security, agriculture, fisheries, technical and vocational training, youth and sports, air connectivity, tourism, arts and heritage, environmental protection and combating illicit trafficking,^[9] as well as civil aviation, law enforcement and civil service cooperation.^[2] Cybersecurity and artificial intelligence are also included.^[49]

Several agreements link institutions directly: the Maldives Police Service's police college with Pakistan's National Police Academy, and the Maldivian Civil Service Commission with Pakistan's Federal Public Service Commission and Civil Service Academy. Another covers the recruitment of health professionals.^[43] Others provide for the construction of a medical school, the resumption of air services, social security and cooperation against drug smuggling.^[29]

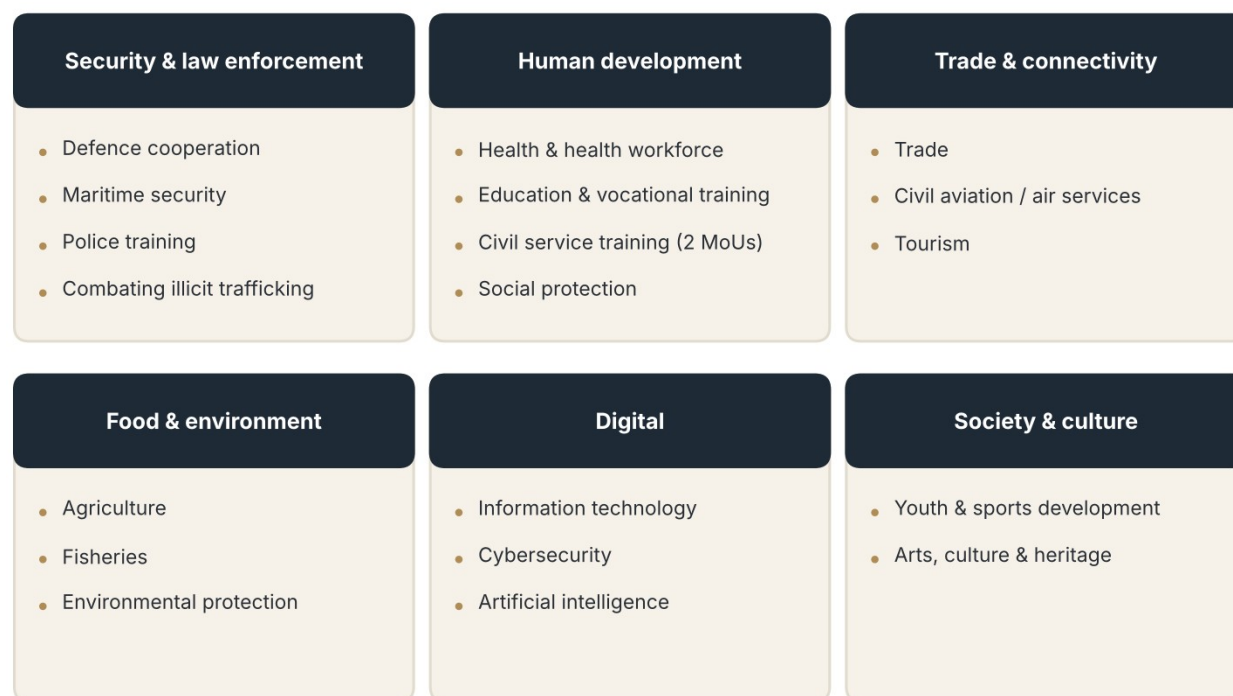


PHOTOS 26-29 Officials exchange memoranda of understanding at the Prime Minister's House as President Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif look on, 21 October 2026.

Photo: Official handout

Figure 3. What the twenty MoUs cover

Sectors grouped by SAT into six clusters



Source: SAT Research Desk, from Radio Pakistan, Geo News, The Edition and OrissaPOST, 21 October 2026.

6.2 Commitments announced alongside

- **Trade:** raise bilateral trade from about US\$13 million to US\$200 million in two years, and convene the JEC early.^[2]
- **Food and medicines:** essential food commodities and pharmaceuticals for the Maldives, including through government-to-government arrangements.^[2]
- **Scholarships:** 20 additional undergraduate scholarships a year for Maldivian students, with wider cooperation in healthcare, training and capacity-building.^[2]
- **Climate:** 100,000 olive cuttings and 100,000 seeds within 12 months, and Pakistani experts to set up nurseries, helping produce one million plants in three years for the Five Million Tree Initiative.^[2]
- **Digital:** Pakistani expertise to support the Maldives' plans for data centres.^[9]
- **Air link:** a study of direct flights to Malé by Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) or another Pakistani carrier, and plans for flights to Pakistan by the Maldivian national airline.^[10]
- **Sea link:** a shipping plan for a direct service from Karachi or Gwadar to Malé.^[10]

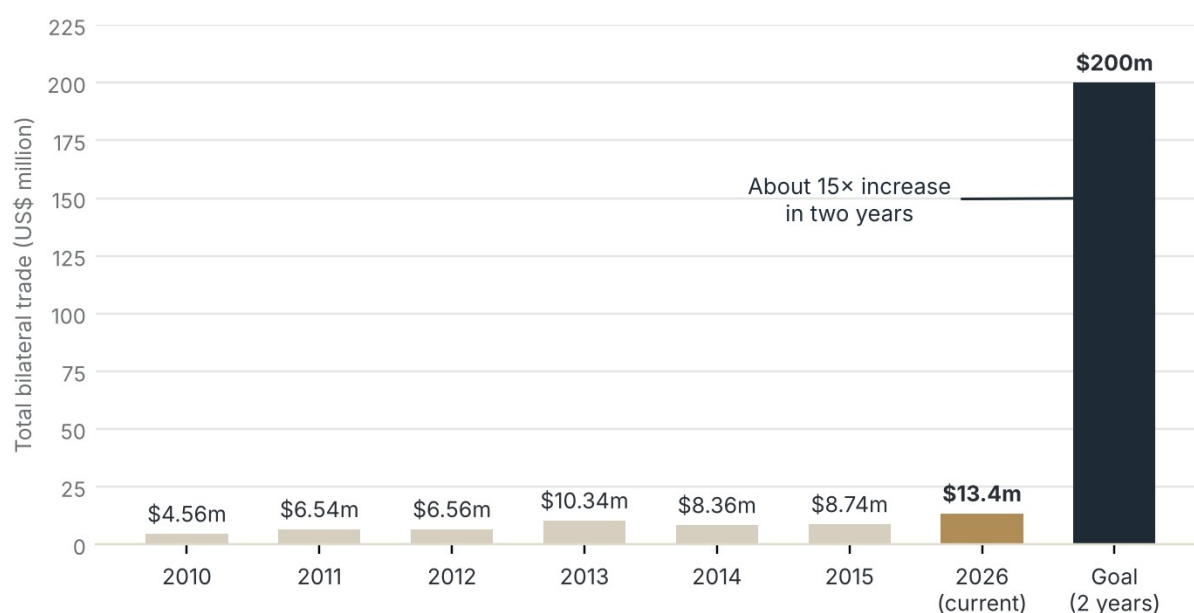
- **Follow-up:** a delegation of Pakistani business leaders and officials to visit the Maldives within weeks to turn discussions into implementable agreements.^[10]

6.3 The trade goal in perspective

Trade grew from about US\$2 million in 2003–04 to between US\$4.5 million and US\$10 million a year in the decade to 2015, and stands at about US\$13 million today.^[27,2] The new goal would multiply it roughly fifteen times in two years. Both leaders tied it to the same enablers: direct shipping, direct flights and active business networks.^[10]

Figure 4. Pakistan-Maldives trade and the new goal

Total two-way trade in goods, US\$ million



Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity data for 2010–2015, as compiled by Wikipedia; Radio Pakistan, 21 October 2026, for the current figure and the goal. Official remarks cited the current figure as US\$13–13.9 million. Series are indicative.

SECTION 07

Areas of Cooperation

Table 3 maps the main areas of cooperation: what has been built, what the October 2026 visit added, and a possible next step suggested by SAT.

Table 3. Areas of cooperation

Area	Foundations	Added in October 2026	Possible next step (SAT)
Diplomacy and multilateral affairs	Coordinated positions at the UN, OIC and SAARC ^[5]	Shared support for Palestine and for reviving SAARC	Annual foreign-office consultations
Parliaments	Parliament building; Speaker-level visits; parliamentary MoU (2025) ^[28]	Majlis Speaker's visit to Pakistan, September 2026	Annual friendship-group exchanges
Defence and maritime security	Training links; Maldivian Defence Adviser in Islamabad; 2004 tsunami rescue ^[18,5]	Defence and maritime security MoUs; Field Marshal's call	Annual programme of training and exercises
Health and education	School of Medicine; training opportunities ^[5]	Health workforce, education and vocational training MoUs; 20 more scholarships a year	Alumni network; recognition of qualifications
Trade and investment	HBL since 1976; JEC since 2005 ^[5,27]	US\$200m goal; food and medicines offer; Business Forum	Regular JEC; chamber-to-chamber links
Connectivity and tourism	Growing Pakistani interest in Maldivian tourism ^[41]	Civil aviation and tourism MoUs; halal tourism	Launch of a direct route; joint promotion
Governance and institutions	Training for civil servants and security personnel ^[27]	Civil service, police training and social protection MoUs	Exchange calendar and secondments
Climate and environment	Shared concerns as climate-vulnerable states ^[7]	Environment MoU; plants and nursery support	Joint positions on climate finance
Digital	Pakistan's growing information technology sector	Information technology, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence MoU; data-centre offer	A first joint project
People and culture	Maldivian students and families in Pakistan ^[29]	Youth, sports, arts and heritage MoUs	Sixtieth-anniversary cultural programme

Source: SAT Research Desk; the final column sets out SAT suggestions, not announced plans.

7.1 Diplomacy and people-to-people ties

Diplomacy between the two countries runs on several tracks at once. At the top, leaders meet on the margins of the UN and at state visits; foreign ministries coordinate at the UN, OIC and SAARC; and resident High Commissions in both capitals manage the daily relationship.^[5,1] Parliamentary diplomacy has grown fastest in recent years, with Speaker-level visits in both directions, an MoU between the National Assembly and the People's Majlis, and a Pakistan–Maldives Parliamentary Friendship Group in the National Assembly.^[28,50]

People-to-people ties are carried by students, doctors, families and travellers. Maldivian students have long studied in Pakistan under scholarship and training schemes, and Pakistan's offer of 20 additional undergraduate scholarships a year will widen that pipeline.^[5,2] A meeting with Maldivian families living in Pakistan was part of the President's programme.^[29] The MoUs on youth, sports, arts and heritage, together with a youth exchange programme the President highlighted, give these ties a formal framework for the first time.^[9]

The two First Ladies also met during the visit. First Lady Sajidha Mohamed's meeting with First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari provided a platform to exchange perspectives, cultivate closer relations and celebrate the enduring friendship and mutual respect shared by the Maldives and Pakistan.^[45]



PHOTO 30 First Lady Sajidha Mohamed meets First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 31 The two First Ladies exchange gifts.

Photo: Official handout

SECTION 08

Why the Partnership Matters

8.1 For the Maldives

Pakistan offers practical inputs that an ocean nation of half a million people values: food and medicines, health professionals, training places for civil servants and police officers, and university scholarships. The visit also reflects President Muizzu's approach of building a wide network of partnerships. His first visit abroad as president was to Türkiye in November 2023, followed by state visits to China in January 2024 and to India in October 2024.^[51]

8.2 For Pakistan

For Pakistan, the Maldives is a trusted partner in the Indian Ocean and a friend with which it shares faith, a regional organisation and a common voice on issues such as Palestine. The relationship offers markets for Pakistani food, pharmaceuticals, information technology services and education, and showcases the human-capital and training strengths that Pakistan brings to development partnerships.

8.3 For the region

The partnership complements, rather than competes with, both countries' other relationships. The Maldives maintains warm ties with all its partners in the region and beyond, including a state visit to the Maldives by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July 2025.^[52] Both Islamabad and Malé support reviving SAARC so that South Asia's eight nations can address shared challenges collectively.^[48,9] As climate-vulnerable states, they also share an interest in a stronger voice for developing countries on climate finance and resilience.^[7]

“...the only way for agreements to work is to produce results.”

PRESIDENT DR MOHAMED MUIZZU, 21 OCTOBER 2026,
AS QUOTED BY THE EDITION

SECTION 09

Building Ties at Every Level

The visit gave the relationship an agenda. Turning it into a lasting partnership calls for engagement at every level of government and society. Table 4 sets out SAT's recommendations for what may be done. They are proposals for consideration, not commitments announced by either government.

Table 4. SAT recommendations: building ties at every level

Level	What may be done
Leaders and foreign ministries	An annual leaders' contact and foreign-secretary consultations A published plan, with a lead agency and timeline, for each of the 20 MoUs A joint calendar for the sixtieth anniversary, through July 2027
Parliaments	Annual exchanges between the two friendship groups Committee-to-committee links on climate, health and trade Training for Majlis staff at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services
Trade and business	Early and regular JEC sessions with working groups A link between the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industry Pakistani products at Maldivian trade fairs, with a focus on food, pharmaceuticals and halal goods
Connectivity and tourism	A direct flight, starting with a seasonal service A pilot cargo service from Karachi or Gwadar Joint promotion of Maldivian holidays to Pakistani families and of Pakistan's mountains and heritage to Maldivian visitors
Security institutions	Training places, staff talks and exchange visits Joint search-and-rescue and disaster-response exercises Cooperation on maritime awareness and counter-narcotics
Education and health	An alumni network of Maldivians trained in Pakistan University partnerships, for example between the IIUI and the Maldives National University Mutual recognition of qualifications for health professionals
Think tanks and media	An annual Track 1.5 dialogue of officials, scholars and journalists Exchanges of journalists and joint coverage of the anniversary Joint research on Indian Ocean climate and maritime issues
Faith, culture and heritage	Cultural weeks and food festivals in Islamabad, Karachi and Malé An 'Ibn Battuta trail' exhibition on shared Indian Ocean heritage Exchanges of Islamic scholars, calligraphers and artists
Youth and sport	A youth leadership exchange under the youth MoU Football and cricket friendlies and coaching clinics Student volunteer programmes on climate and coastal protection

Source: SAT Research Desk recommendations.

SECTION 10

The Road Ahead

The two governments announced a number of follow-up steps during the visit. Table 5 lists them with the timeframe given in official remarks, where one was stated. At the joint press stakeout, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the two countries would keep strengthening their relations for all time to come.^[53]

Table 5. Announced follow-up and stated timeframes

Area	What was announced	Stated timeframe	Source
Trade	Raise bilateral trade from about US\$13 million to US\$200 million	Within two years	[2,10]
Business	A delegation of Pakistani business leaders and officials to visit the Maldives	About a week after the President's return	[10]
Air link	Pakistan's Aviation Ministry to study direct flights to Malé; the Maldivian national airline to plan flights to Pakistan	Study to begin immediately	[10]
Sea link	Ministers to draw up a shipping plan from Karachi or Gwadar to Malé	Implementable within a short period	[10]
Economic dialogue	Convening of the Joint Economic Commission	Early	[2]
Climate	100,000 olive cuttings and 100,000 seeds for the Five Million Tree Initiative	Over the next 12 months	[2]
Climate	Pakistani experts to help set up nurseries producing one million plants	Within three years	[2]
Education	Additional undergraduate scholarships for Maldivian students	20 a year	[2]
Agreements	Translate the 20 MoUs into action	Prompt decision-making and speedy implementation	[9]

Source: official remarks during the visit, as reported by Radio Pakistan and The Edition.

SECTION 11

Conclusion

For sixty years, Pakistan and the Maldives have been friends in the fullest sense: united by faith, linked by the ocean, and steadfast in support of each other in the world's councils. Their friendship has left lasting landmarks, from a parliament building and a medical school to a naval rescue remembered in Malé to this day.

President Muizzu's state visit has given that friendship a new ambition. Twenty MoUs, a fifteen-fold trade goal, new scholarships and plans for direct flights and shipping now sit alongside the shared heritage of the two nations. Both leaders said results will be the measure. With engagement at every level, from leaders and parliaments to students, scholars and families, the sixtieth anniversary can mark the opening of a new chapter: a partnership as close in daily life as it has always been in spirit.

“There is no doubt that the two countries [will] keep on strengthening these relations for all time to come.”

PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF, JOINT PRESS STAKEOUT, 21 OCTOBER 2026,
AS QUOTED BY WORLD TODAY NEWS



PHOTO 32 At the Pakistan Monument, a symbol of the nation's unity and heritage.

Photo: Official handout



PHOTO 33 Leaders and guests on the evening of the state banquet at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Photo: Official handout

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CREDITS

Photo Credits

Captions, credits and alternative (alt) text for the photographs in this Backgrounder.

Photo	Caption	Alt text	Credit
1	President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and First Lady Sajidha Mohamed arrive at Islamabad International Airport, 20 October 2026.	The Maldivian President and First Lady descend the aircraft steps onto a red carpet at night as Pakistani officials wait to greet them.	Official handout
2	President Muizzu walks past a naval guard of honour on arrival.	The President and his hosts walk along a red carpet lined by sailors and airmen in ceremonial uniforms.	Official handout
3	Mohamed Amin Didi, President of the first Maldivian Republic (1953).	Archival portrait of Mohamed Amin Didi in a suit and spectacles.	File photo
4	Archival photograph from the year of Maldivian independence, 1965.	Archival photograph of officials signing documents at a table while others stand behind them.	File photo
5	Habib Bank Limited's Malé branch; HBL has served the Maldives since 1976.	Shopfront sign of Habib Bank Limited's Malé branch, in English and Dhivehi.	File photo
6	Pakistan's High Commissioner presents his credentials to President Muizzu in Malé.	A Pakistani envoy in a black sherwani and cap hands his letter of credence to President Muizzu.	File photo
7	May 2015: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Abdulla Yameen hold official talks in Islamabad, during the last Maldivian presidential visit before 2026.	Two leaders seated in armchairs between the flags of the Maldives and Pakistan, beneath a portrait of Pakistan's founder.	Official handout
8	October 2026: President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister's House, Islamabad.	The two leaders shake hands in front of rows of Maldivian and Pakistani flags.	Official handout
9	The People's Majlis building in Malé, built with a Pakistani grant and inaugurated on 1 August 1998.	The white facade of the People's Majlis building in Malé, framed by palm trees.	Official handout
10	A Maldivian Ministry of Health briefing on the medical college project.	Officials, including a Pakistani representative, seated at a press briefing beneath a Ministry of Health banner.	Maldives Independent (file)
11	A Pakistan Navy officer receives a Maldivian honour.	A Pakistan Navy officer in white uniform has a medal pinned on by a Maldivian dignitary.	File photo
12	Pakistani dignitaries welcome President Muizzu at the aircraft.	President Muizzu shakes hands with members of the welcoming delegation beside the aircraft steps.	Official handout
13	First Lady Sajidha Mohamed is warmly received in Islamabad.	The First Lady of the Maldives is embraced by a Pakistani dignitary at the foot of the aircraft steps.	Official handout
14	The official welcome at the Prime Minister's House, 21 October 2026.	Leaders take the salute beneath a green canopy as soldiers in ceremonial dress stand to attention.	Official handout

Photo	Caption	Alt text	Credit
15	President Muizzu inspects the tri-service guard of honour.	The President walks between ranks of soldiers, sailors and airmen in ceremonial uniform.	Official handout
16	Restricted talks between the two leaders, 21 October 2026.	Leaders and senior officials seated in a formal sitting room between the flags of both countries.	Official handout
17	Delegation-level talks at the Prime Minister's House.	The two delegations face each other across a long conference table decorated with flowers and both flags.	Official handout
18	President Asif Ali Zardari receives President Muizzu at Aiwan-e-Sadr.	The two presidents shake hands at night at the entrance of the presidential residence.	Official handout
19	Talks at Aiwan-e-Sadr ahead of the state banquet.	The two delegations seated facing each other in a wood-panelled room hung with both national flags.	Official handout
20	The President and First Lady at the Pakistan Monument, Islamabad.	The President, the First Lady and their hosts stand before the petal-shaped granite wings of the Pakistan Monument.	Official handout
21	Touring Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage.	The President walks past a brightly painted display of Pakistani truck art at the Lok Virsa museum.	Official handout
22	Traditional crafts on display at Lok Virsa.	The President and First Lady smile beside glass cases of traditional blue pottery at Lok Virsa.	Official handout
23	First Lady Sajidha Mohamed at the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP).	The Maldivian and Pakistani delegations seated on either side of a meeting table at DRAP, with both flags and a welcome screen.	Official handout
24	The First Lady with DRAP officials and the Maldivian delegation.	A large group of officials poses beneath the green crest of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan.	Official handout
25	The First Lady is welcomed at the National Institute of Health (NIH), Islamabad.	The First Lady, in a navy dress and hijab, is greeted with a bouquet of pink flowers.	Official handout
26	Officials exchange memoranda of understanding at the Prime Minister's House as President Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif look on, 21 October 2026.	Two officials hold up signed memoranda at the Prime Minister's House as the two leaders sit at the table behind them.	Official handout
27	Officials exchange memoranda of understanding at the Prime Minister's House as President Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif look on, 21 October 2026.	A Maldivian and a Pakistani official display signed documents in front of rows of flags.	Official handout
28	Officials exchange memoranda of understanding at the Prime Minister's House as President Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif look on, 21 October 2026.	Officials of both countries exchange memoranda in a chandeliered hall decorated with both flags.	Official handout
29	Officials exchange memoranda of understanding at the Prime Minister's House as President Muizzu and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif look on, 21 October 2026.	Two officials hold signed folders at the exchange ceremony, the leaders seated behind.	Official handout

Photo	Caption	Alt text	Credit
30	First Lady Sajidha Mohamed meets First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari.	The two First Ladies seated side by side in a reception room between the flags of both countries.	Official handout
31	The two First Ladies exchange gifts.	The First Ladies receive a framed traditional textile presented by a naval aide in white uniform.	Official handout
32	At the Pakistan Monument, a symbol of the nation's unity and heritage.	President Muizzu and First Lady Sajidha Mohamed stand together in front of the Pakistan Monument.	Official handout
33	Leaders and guests on the evening of the state banquet at Aiwan-e-Sadr.	Leaders and guests walk together along a red carpet through a marble hall.	Official handout

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