

Seminar



# Shusha

## CULTURE CAPITAL OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD FOR 2024

**A Testament to the  
Muslim World's Rich Heritage**

December 19, 2024



**MUSLIM Institute**



MUSLIM Institute, in collaboration with the Embassy of Republic of Azerbaijan, organized a seminar at the National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad. The seminar was chaired by Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, Former President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. H.E. Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali, Chairman of the MUSLIM Institute, delivered the opening remarks, while Prof. Engr. Zamir Ahmed Awan, Sinologist and Diplomat moderated the proceedings. The event was attended by diplomats, scholars, academics, and policymakers, who actively participated in the discussion.

# Expert Panellists

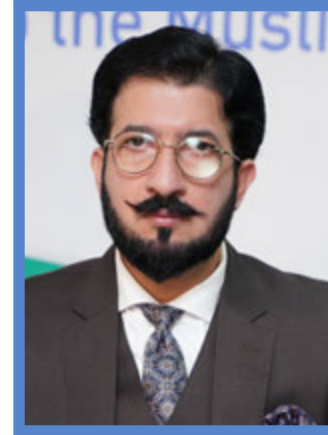


Cultural Capital of the Islamic World for 2024  
A Testament to the Muslim World's Rich Heritage



**Sardar Masood Khan**

Former President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir



**H.E. Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali**

Chairman MUSLIM Institute



**H.E. Khazar Farhadov**

Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan



**H.E. Alisher Tokhtaev**

Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan



**Ambassador Major General (R)  
Raza Muhammad**

President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)



**Ambassador Ishtiaq H. Andrabi**

Former Additional Secretary for Foreign Affairs



## *Summary of the views expressed by the distinguished speakers is as follows:*

Shusha has been declared the Cultural Capital of the Islamic World for 2024. This prestigious recognition, under the auspices of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), celebrates not only the city of Shusha but also the enduring richness and vibrancy of the Islamic world's cultural heritage. It is result of Azerbaijan's extraordinary efforts to restore the city's historical and religious landmarks.

For decades, Shusha stood as a silent witness to history — its grandeur diminished but never forgotten. Following the city's liberation from Armenian occupation, the Azerbaijani government embarked on an ambitious journey to restore Shusha's historical image. These efforts include the reconstruction of four ancient mosques and the meticulous restoration of several others.



One of the most iconic structures restored in Shusha is the Yuhari Govhar Agha Mosque, originally built in 1855, showcasing a profound commitment to cultural preservation. In 2022, Shusha was celebrated as the Capital of Azerbaijani Culture, followed by its designation as the Culture Capital of the Turkic World in 2023. Now, it proudly holds the title of the Culture Capital of the Islamic World. At its peak, Shusha played a pivotal role in international trade, particularly the silk trade. The city's architecture, including its trade centers and caravanserais, reflects its historical significance in fostering economic and cultural exchanges.



The rich legacy of Shusha includes its streets and squares, stronghold walls, palaces such as the Palace of Panah Ali Khan, mausoleums, springs, and the homes of the city aristocracy. The decades of occupation brought immeasurable challenges, but Azerbaijan's resilience and determination ensured that Shusha's cultural and religious heritage would be restored and celebrated once again. This achievement holds profound significance, particularly in the face of threats faced by Islamic cultural heritage around the world. From the systematic challenges to Islamic heritage in India under repressive Hindutva policies to the destruction of sacred sites in Palestine due to inhumane occupation and apartheid, and the toll of conflicts and civil wars across the Middle East, the preservation of Islamic identity and heritage is a shared challenge for the global Muslim community. Azerbaijan's success in restoring Shusha serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for the entire Islamic world.

Shusha holds a profound and special place in the hearts of Azerbaijanis and the people of brotherly countries. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan have made significant contributions to the development of the liberated areas. Azerbaijan is deeply grateful for the similar efforts extended by brotherly Muslim countries, especially Pakistan.





Azerbaijan has adhered to UN Security Council resolutions, which called for the unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from occupied territories — a process supported by Pakistan in 1993. Shusha now stands as a testament to Azerbaijan's tolerance and its multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society. The rapid revival of Shusha by the Azerbaijani government is a remarkable achievement, reflecting the nation's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage. Additionally, it highlights Azerbaijan's rapid development, which continues to shape global impressions of the country.

Azerbaijan is leveraging soft power to project itself as an open and inclusive society, welcoming economic and cultural cooperation from all parts of the world, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, while making significant strides in development. Pakistan and Azerbaijan, along with other Central Asian countries, have immense potential for collaboration. Both nations share a common history, culture and religion, fostering close ties. For instance, if direct flights between Pakistan and Azerbaijan were available, travel to Central Asia would take less time. Unfortunately, the absence of such flights is a challenge that both countries, alongside Central Asian states, need to address.





In the economic realm, there are two key areas of potential cooperation. The first is energy, as Azerbaijan is an energy-rich nation, offering opportunities for collaboration in this sector. The second is technology. Azerbaijan is advancing rapidly in technology and artificial intelligence, while Pakistan boasts a talented, innovative, and hardworking youth population excelling in technology, start-ups, and online platforms. The potential to capitalize on these mutually beneficial strengths is vast.

The people of Pakistan have deep-rooted connections with their cultural heritage. The region is home to some of the most iconic romantic tales of the Indo-Pak subcontinent like Heer Ranjha. Geographically, Pakistan hosts the ancient Aashori and Gandhara civilization and the archaeological sites of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, as well as the historic cities of Multan and Uch Sharif. This rich cultural environment instills a love and appreciation for heritage, inspiring efforts toward its preservation.

May Shusha's story continue to inspire us all to cherish and uphold the values, traditions, and heritage that define our shared Islamic identity. Together, let us ensure that cities like Shusha remain enduring symbols of our rich history and legacy.



## *Interactive Session*

**Worthy speakers addressed the questions raised by the participants. Summary of the same is given below:**



Shusha city was founded by Panah Ali Khan in the 18th century to protect Karabakh from enemies. It resembles a fort and, in the Azerbaijani language, "Shusha" means "highest place." The city is renowned for its pleasant climate, stunning natural landscapes, and fresh air. Strategically located in the Karabakh region, Shusha holds a vital position in the southern Caucasus.

During its liberation, Azerbaijani soldiers used light weapons, being mindful to ensure preservation of Shusha's historical and cultural heritage. The restoration of Shusha's historical architecture, is underway, although its landscape and small population pose challenges for construction.

Since liberation, two international airports have been established in Shusha within three years, with direct flights



from Pakistan and Central Asian states expected soon. Karabakh University is set to be the first university established in Shusha, with highly qualified faculty in science and technology being recruited. In Pakistan, universities like LUMS reserve seats for Central Asian students, and the Azerbaijani government offers scholarships for bachelor's and master's degree programs. The number of Pakistani students studying in Azerbaijan is steadily increasing, with over 2,000 currently pursuing medical studies in various cities. Azerbaijan has also signed MOUs with 10 to 15 Pakistani universities. Trade between Azerbaijan and Pakistan is growing, with future agreements supported by Türkiye and Central Asian states projected to reach billions of dollars. In recent months, 60,000 Pakistanis visited Baku on tourist visas, facilitated by a streamlined visa process. Road transportation between the two countries is also expected to commence soon.



#### CONTACT US



**MUSLIM Institute**  
*Mission of Unity, Stability and  
Leadership In Muslims*

PO Box: 562,  
Islamabad, Pakistan

[info@muslim-institute.org](mailto:info@muslim-institute.org)  
[www.muslim-institute.org](http://www.muslim-institute.org)