

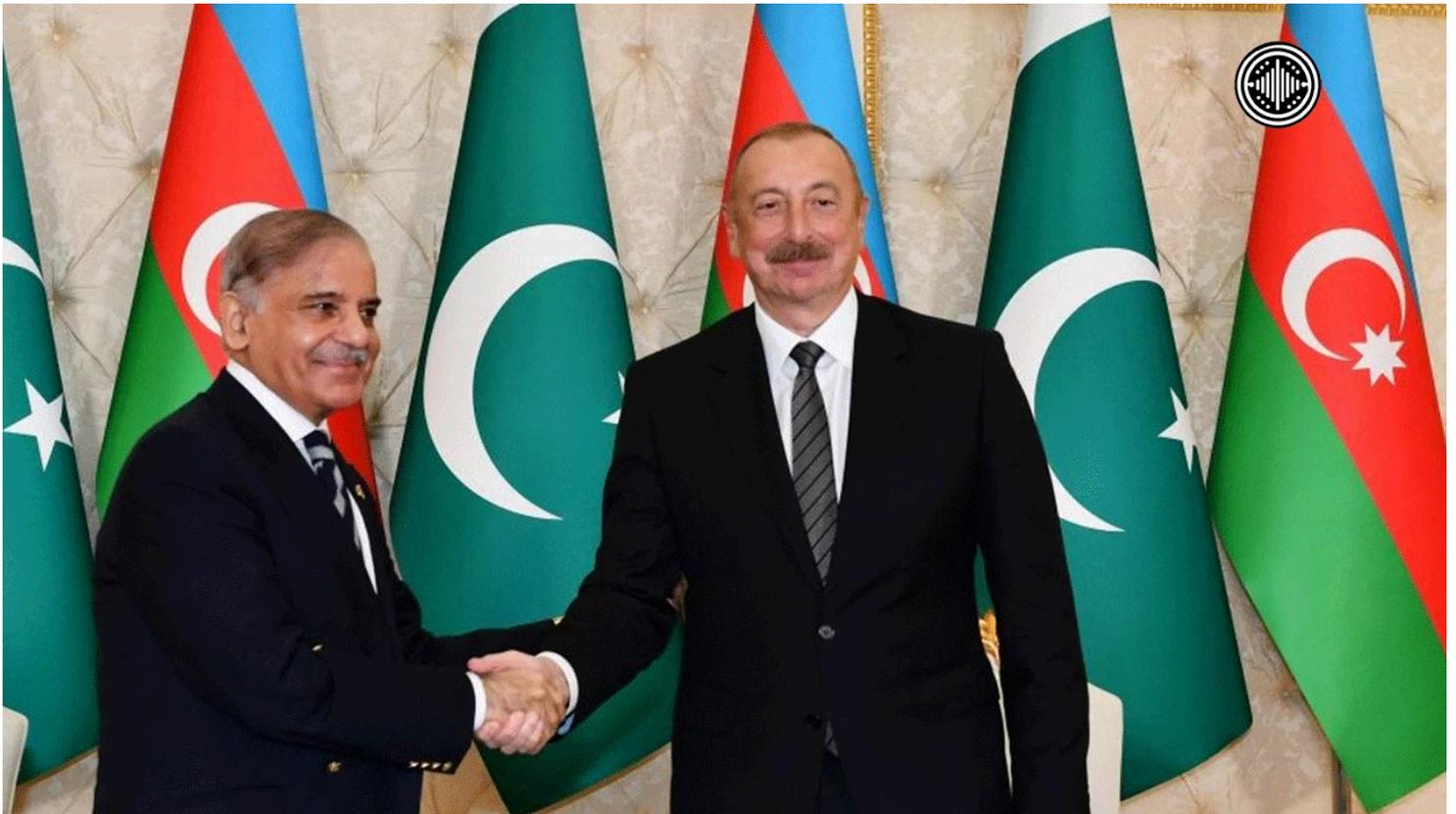
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Pakistan and Azerbaijan Forge Strategic Partnership Through Rail and Trade Ties

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Pakistan and Azerbaijan have agreed to set up joint working groups (JWGs) to deepen economic ties and enhance connectivity through a rail and trade-focused partnership. The move signals a shift toward a more strategic economic relationship between the two nations, with an emphasis on regional integration and infrastructure development.

At the heart of this agreement is a recent high-level meeting hosted at Pakistan's Ministry of Railways, chaired by Minister of State for Railways and Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani. The

session included senior government officials and technical experts to identify practical steps for expanding cross-border trade through upgraded rail infrastructure.

Minister Kayani emphasized Pakistan's commitment to bolstering transport and logistics capabilities with Azerbaijan, a country that has increasingly aligned with Pakistan on key regional matters. He highlighted ongoing efforts by the Pakistani leadership, particularly Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, to modernize the country's aging railway system, a core component of its broader economic development agenda. While the government continues to announce bold initiatives, critics argue that progress has often lagged behind rhetoric, particularly under the current administration's economic management.

A detailed briefing from the railways secretary outlined Pakistan's current rail capacity and outlined plans for future development to accommodate greater freight movement. The proposed initiatives aim to position Pakistan as a central trade corridor linking Central Asia and the broader region.

Discussions also touched on a trilateral rail agreement between Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, an initiative that further highlights the growing regional emphasis on overland connectivity. Officials underscored the importance of integrating Azerbaijan into this broader network, which could serve as a counterbalance to other regional trade blocs and influence.

Simultaneously, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (DPM/FM) Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar and Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov reaffirmed their nations' growing partnership during a phone call. Both sides expressed satisfaction with ongoing cooperation and reiterated the importance of maintaining close diplomatic and economic ties.