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Report- In-House Meeting
“Bangladesh Media Delegation”

March 22, 2017



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-house Meeting with a 7-member Bangladesh Media Delegation on March 22, 2017. The delegation included Mr. Badrul Ahsan, Associate Editor Daily Observer; Mr. Abu Jar M. Akkas, Deputy Editor, New Age; Barrister Sarwar Hossein, Member G-9 Think Tank; Dr. Mohammad Jasimuddin, Senior Research Fellow, BISS; Mr. Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, Senior Diplomatic Correspondent, The Independent and Ms. Mehmuda Habiba, Member G-9 Think Tank.

Welcoming the delegation, Chairman ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood recounted the deep association that the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh have with each other. He commended the patriotic spirit always displayed by the people of Bangladesh and stated that Pakistanis always receive their Bengali brothers with open arms. He went on to say that currently, the world is in a great flux and turbulence is all around us. Asia has become, more or less, an epicenter of all instability and that it is a pity that after such a long time the situation has only worsened instead of getting any better. Pakistan is making all efforts to have a peaceful neighborhood, and it is trying to promote an Afghan-led reconciliation and counter the menace of terrorism.

Ambassador Mahmood stated that all parties need to consult and make every effort to counter terrorism. He highlighted Pakistan's exemplary relationship with China which is not just a strategic relationship anymore, but is now also geared towards a more economic-oriented cooperation under CPEC. He said that Pakistan looks forward to the CPEC projects now underway because the realization of this mega project will have beneficial impacts on the economic and political relations not just between Pakistan and China, but also within the region and beyond. He also stated that SAARC needs to be revived and that it should not be treated as a political tool. The Chairman emphasised that both Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot allow themselves to remain in the past and must move forward. There are already many prospects, trade being one of them. Now, other avenues of cooperation such as greater people-to-people contact need to be explored. Hence, both countries need to build upon their commonalities and identify more areas of cooperation.

The delegates from Bangladesh talked about how despite the trauma and tragedy, the time has come to break free of the past. The issue of the apology for the 1971 war was also raised. It was pointed out that even though the sentiments at the people-to-people level were excellent, relations at the government level have not been very savory. The people of Bangladesh consider the entire subcontinent as part of their cultural legacy. It is important for both countries to have relations that have a basis on which the young people of both countries can come together. Countries that live in the past are unable to face the future. The delegates lay emphasis on the fact that whatever has been happening between Pakistan and Bangladesh are a temporary phase. Each country has a strong legacy, and political history and cultural affinities help bring people together. There is a certain gap between the two countries that needs to be filled. In order to do that, a robust diplomatic engagement between the two countries need to take place. There are two aspects in the relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh : one is government-to-government relations; and the other is people versus people feelings. The last consultation between the foreign offices of the two countries took place in 2009-2010, and this gap needs to be filled.

Researchers from the ISSI also contributed to the discussion. One researcher recounted the brotherly feelings when cricket matches happen. He said that while on the people-to-people level we have cordial sentiments, the real trouble makers need to be identified. Others reiterated their sentiments of brotherly relations and called for more interaction between the youth of the two countries.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by saying that the two countries have been linked with each other since ages. Pakistan owes its existence to the initiation of the Pakistan Movement in Bengal. While there are common grievances on both sides, but each side has to look forward to the future, otherwise, there will be no end to grievances. Hence, both sides need to make an effort to put the acrimony of the past to rest and look forward and bridge the gaps in their relationship. He concluded that as both countries become more democratic, the peoples power will assert and their sentiments will prevail over the wounds of the past.