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Report – Seminar

“Pakistan, Central Asia and CPEC: A Vision for Improved Connectivity”

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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a seminar titled "*Pakistan, Central Asia and CPEC: A Vision for Improved Connectivity*" on November 13, 2018. Foreign Secretary Ms. Tehmina Janjua was the Chief Guest at the occasion, while other keynote speakers included: H.E. Mr. Yao Jing, Ambassador of People's Republic of China, H.E. Mr. Barlybay Sadykov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Beishembiev, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, H.E. Mr. Sherali Jononov, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Mr. Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Republic of Turkmenistan, and H.E. Mr. Furqat Sidiqov, Ambassador of Republic of Uzbekistan.

Welcoming the guests, Director General ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that the presence of the Foreign Secretary is testament to the importance that Pakistan attaches to its relations with China and Central Asia. He spoke about the recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to China in November 2018, and said that the comprehensive joint statement issued after the meetings between the leaders showed their resolve and commitment to CPEC and strengthening economic cooperation. Describing the priorities of CPEC, he was of the view that the presence of the Chinese and Central Asian ambassadors will help us to understand the challenges and opportunities for better connectivity under the Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative'. Reminiscing about his own personal experiences, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that the people of Pakistan and Central Asia are bound by shared history, culture with regional proximity, and who today, have achieved a high level of development that is impressive.

He said that the primary focus of Pakistan's foreign policy is on developing mutual cooperation. Pakistan provides important routes to the Indian Ocean to Central Asian Republics (CARs), and CPEC is central to this connectivity. CPEC is not just about infrastructure or energy cooperation, but it covers a wide spectrum of connectivity to bring prosperity to the entire region. He said that the leadership of all these countries have maintained and developed close contacts with each other both bilaterally, and through multilateral set ups like SCO which reflects their commitment for improved connectivity between their regions. He concluded by saying that we all have common stakes in peace and stability within this region, and more importantly, for its progress and prosperity. The current level of trade with CAR's is not high, but it can take a boost through

CPEC and the larger BRI, aided by the growing infrastructure for connectivity and opportunities for cooperation. He said that Pakistan has come a long way in defeating terrorism, and our successes in counterterrorism have given a boost not just to our own economy, but also to opportunities for greater economic ties with China and Central Asia including cooperation to address human resource requirements, as well as training and skill development in order to achieve improved connectivity. However, for all of these opportunities to bear fruit, an important factor is peace and stability in Afghanistan. Channels of connectivity will get an added boost if peace returns to Afghanistan.

The Foreign Secretary, Ms. Tehmina Janjua thanked the ISSI for the honor and said that Pakistan and China are strategic partners. CPEC, Ms. Janjua said, is of vital importance, and the leadership of both countries considers this project as an engine of growth and strategic importance. She said that we are proud to be a part of CPEC. She informed the audience about Prime Minister Imran Khan's successful visit of China, and said that he was met with exceptional diplomatic protocol. In his meetings with President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li, Vice President Wang and Chairman of CPC, he got the opportunity to speak directly on bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and international issues. It was quite a successful visit and included several important MOU's and bilateral agreements. It has been agreed that CPEC is an important platform for enhancing connectivity, as well as benefiting the people of the two countries.

According to Ms. Janjua, the PM has stressed that his government is committed to successful and timely implementation of the CPEC projects. He also outlined his vision for CPEC, including social benefits for Pakistan, as well as industrial and agricultural cooperation, and poverty alleviation. She said that the Chinese leadership has reiterated their commitment to CPEC and underscored its role for economic development of Pakistan. With successful completion of some of the infrastructure and energy related projects and both countries are now moving to work on social and economic development projects which show the commitment of the Chinese people to the people of Pakistan. She was of the view that connectivity is the name of the game in this century. Every country of the world wants to enhance its connectivity with its neighbors and with the region. Pakistan too, is desirous to enhance its connectivity with its neighbors and with the region. We are convinced that this region can grow up with better and enhanced connectivity for the well-being of the people.

Today, CPEC offers enormous opportunities to link up Central Asian States, Russia, and Africa. The Karakorum Highway can be used to connect Pakistan with CAR's through Tajikistan, which can play the role of gateway for Pakistan to access Central Asia. She suggested that Pakistan is moving, and have to work hard on developing the nine special economic zones under CPEC which will be able to provide opportunities to the world for investments in these economic zones. CPEC will bring development in areas where development has not yet reached. New transportation and connectivity opportunities will bring peace and stability in both South and Central Asia. She spoke about the energy projects of Pakistan with CAR's such as CASA-1000 and TAPI gas pipeline, and said that they will strengthen Pakistan relations with CAR's. Highlighting the importance of Gwadar located at the mouth of the Gulf, she said that it is the most feasible port for western China, Central Asian Republics, Russia and even Mongolia. Gwadar Port will not only double the capacity of Pakistan's maritime trade, it will also open a window to sea for the landlocked countries in Central and Eurasia. Rehabilitation of roads to Afghanistan from Gwadar Port will also give Afghan products quick export possibility for shipping.

Ms. Janjua was of the view that economic connectivity is an important factor for achieving peace and stability. In the emerging world order, emphasis is on economic cooperation rather than political alliances. For Pakistan, located at the crossroads of Central and West Asia, such cooperation provides tremendous opportunities. The role of CPEC is not only confined to economic development of Pakistan, it also provides opportunity to our friends and neighbors. We will work together with the Central Asian States and China to take the projects of CPEC to greater heights of cooperation and connectivity.

Ambassador of People's Republic of China, H.E. Mr. Yao Jing praised Mr. Imran Khan's recent visit to China and said that according to Chinese leadership this visit was very significant. He said that Mr. Khan briefed the Chinese leadership about his vision and future development of Pakistan. His briefings were very convincing and encouraging. Ambassador Yao Jing said that the Joint Statement after the visit makes it clear that both China and Pakistan want to work more closely for a shared future in the new era. He said that good chemistry has been established between the leadership of the two countries, and China is quite convinced that Mr. Imran Khan is determined in his new direction for Pakistan towards poverty alleviation, development of

agriculture and measures for anti-corruption. This kind of chemistry is more important between the two leaderships.

According to Ambassador Yao Jing, CPEC was the major issue of discussions and it will be further broadened and expanded in terms of both efforts and projects. The ongoing projects will be carried forward. He said that detailed plans of CPEC should be a vehicle for broader regional connectivity, and that third party shall be invited to participate in CPEC cooperation. It was five years ago when President Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan where he initiated the concept of Silk Road of economic cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He emphasized that Pakistan is one of the most important friend and partner in this neighborhood. We believe all these regional countries - CAR's, China and Pakistan - are developing countries and that we must focus on a policy for further development of their national economy. He said that efforts for geographical connectivity and economic development will definitely help us to move closer. He suggested that we can cooperate for peace and stability of this region, and China has started efforts for reconciliation in Afghanistan including how to deal with challenges like terrorism and drug trafficking in this region. He was of the view that we have a lot of things to cooperate on, and further, CARs are rich in resources and together with China and Pakistan, have the potential to make this region more vibrant.

Along with all the opportunities, Ambassador Yao Jing said that there are several challenges for us in this region, and regional countries have realized that they should work together. Several initiatives from Pakistan, Uzbekistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have already started. China welcomes and support regional approaches and initiatives for peace and stability and the resumption of reconciliation process in Afghanistan. Concluding his remarks, Ambassador Yao Jing said that we have started a new trilateral cooperation between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan and there have been some discussions on projects of connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan. China will definitely support these efforts for further progress that will help demonstrate the true essence of BRI.

H.E. Mr. Barlybay Sadykov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan expressed his gratitude to the ISSI and its Director General and Chairman for organizing this important event in order to explore the potential for greater connectivity with

Central Asian Republics and beyond. He began his talk by emphasizing the importance of investing in connectivity, which depends on the ability to create and maintain inter-regional trade flows. The 21st century is after all, he noted, a time of rapid globalization, the fourth industrial revolution, digital progress, and new transport and road linkages in which the pace of connectivity will be determined by a number of factors including the ease of business, the access to transport through lower costs, and effective trade connections, which is the framework through which inter-regional potentials can be reaped.

Describing the priorities of Kazakhstan as the largest landlocked country in the world, Ambassador Sadykov elaborated that his country has always attached great importance to regional collaboration and connectivity. For Kazakhstan, he said, transport and the potential for transit are significant issues, and regional cooperation as a policy has always been followed as a means to connect to the rest of the world. He noted that it is in this context that platforms such as the Central Asian Union and Eurasian Union have been supported and pursued by Kazakhstan. He expressed his delight at new avenues of cooperation between Central Asian countries today, particularly pointing to the historic significance of the Central Asian summit in Astana earlier in 2018. This was, as he briefly described, an occasion that brought together all the heads of the states of the participating countries and established the basic priorities of regional cooperation while also looking to the future by agreements on future plans. All the countries showed their desire to increase trade and cooperation, including interregional trade, collaboration on security and other forms of communication, and simplifying trade and easing barriers. This was an important juncture that showed the common thinking of the Central Asian Republics.

Ambassador Sadykov continued that Kazakhstan has strategically important ties with countries beyond the region as well, and that its strategic partnerships with the US, China, and EU countries add to its relations with Russia and other Central Asian Republics. It was thus that the Kazakh head of the state had led an initiative in 1994 in Moscow to create a Eurasian foundation, which has now been signed in Astana. This has huge potential for cooperation between Europe and Asia, he suggested, and highlighted that this included Pakistan as well.

Further discussing the role of Kazakhstan, Ambassador Sadykov described its Transit Transport Strategy as “the Bright Path” that will see the country as a logistics and transport hub enabling connections in all directions through an efficient and modern transport network. The idea behind

this is to have a strategic program to capitalize on Kazakhstan's strategic location and its links with other countries. Moreover, this strategy also provides the country the opportunity to maximize its potential for accessing road links and sea ports for trade. In offering digital solutions for transport and managing new methods, Ambassador Sadykov noted that Kazakhstan had invested approximately \$30 billion in transport infrastructure, including in 2,500 km railways and 4,000 km roads, modernization of a seaport on the Caspian Sea, and creating Special Economic Zones on the border with China. He stressed that through these long term plans, Kazakhstan has a presence on ports in Iran and China, while it links with Iran and Turkmenistan through railways, as a result of which it offers connection with Pakistan as well. In all these projects, he said that an additional \$8.5 billion will likely be spent on transport by 2020.

Ambassador Sadykov commented that this strategy and corresponding projects of Kazakhstan are following the same trajectories as China in its major program of the BRI in this region. This is since both call for removing barriers to trade and for building infrastructure, which is what Kazakhstan has been investing in and supporting. This has led to a dynamic development of trade routes in concert with BRI, and has added new life to the sea and rail routes through investments in major projects since rail routes for trade have been cheaper and more efficient. In his final comments, Ambassador Sadykov also highlighted that these projects connect Central Asia to South Asia and beyond, and offer much benefits to Pakistan as well. Kazakhstan is also interested in Pakistan and connecting through the Karakoram Highway and on to Pakistan's seaports, and also desires that member states of the SCO come together for this project of connectivity. He pointed out that SCO can be interested in the plans for a Eurasian high speed railway connecting Beijing to Astana and Moscow and onwards to Berlin. This is even beyond the connectivity and links being established in this region that involve Pakistan as well through TAPI, CASA-1000, and CPEC. He concluded his talk by emphasizing that economic cooperation can be a major way forward to create peace and stability, and the pace for regional connectivity that BRI has created can help fulfil this potential. This requires effective connectivity through easier access and services in financial and labor market. It is in this context, he noted, that Kazakhstan had opened the Astana Financial Centre in July 2018 in order to enable and facilitate trade and economic cooperation in the region. He concluded that Kazakhstan desires extensive trade and economic cooperation with Pakistan, and to increase connectivity, which is part of its desire for peace and stability in the region.

H.E. Mr. Erik Beishembiev, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic thanked the ISSI and the Foreign Secretary, and expressed his desire for connectivity and opportunities for the whole region. He also pointed to the economic globalization of an interdependent world, in which he expressed his optimism and confidence in the possibility of progress for all countries through economic corridors. Ambassador Beishembiev stressed the desire for bilateral economic cooperation with Pakistan and his delight at increasing ties exemplified by excellent relations and regular high level visits between the two countries. He also described the economic development of Kyrgyzstan where major changes are underway, and investment is safe, easy and profitable with full protection of investment and unlimited repatriation of profit. He also reflected on the educated workforce of the country and the direct access to state authorities that makes Kyrgyzstan an ideal country for cooperation.

Discussing bilateral relations between the two countries, Ambassador Beishembiev noted that the Kyrgyzstan-Pakistan Commission founded in 1994 had held its third meeting in January 2017 in Islamabad, but lamented that the cooperation level in trade is still low and the potential is yet to be realized. While the investment of Pakistan in Kyrgyzstan is about \$5 million, he suggested that much more needs to be done to have extensive two-way trade and expressed his optimism that CPEC will allow for a more convenient way for further bilateral cooperation.

He informed the audience that Kyrgyzstan is interested in short transport links with China, CARs, and Pakistan, and desires to use railways and roads to access seaports such as Gwadar in the context of CPEC. Giving details of the lengths and possibilities of certain routes, he particularly highlighted the road shared by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan toward China, as the shortest and most effective channel for the country. He commented that while there is the facilitation of transit traffic between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan such as on the Karakoram Highway, it is not currently working to its full potential and needs to be enhanced by negotiations underway to facilitate goods through the border. Furthermore, there are also negotiations between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan for trade on the aforementioned shortest route so that its potential can be achieved. Once this is completed, the road to the Middle East for Kyrgyzstan can be reduced to 1,000 km, and the trade goods can be delivered in seven days. Giving further logistical details, Ambassador Beishembiev said that three tracks each from Kyrgyzstan, China and Uzbekistan will also mean that the route will allow for a 920 km caravan

of trucks with a driving time of 16 hours, thus closely connecting the regional countries through trade and transit. It is thus not surprising that there is much interest in new trade opportunities for quick transport of goods. He anticipated that the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China Motor Corridor is expected to have its regular activity this year and will be connecting the region and reduce costs in the process.

Ambassador Beishembiev concluded his talk by congratulating China and Pakistan for the launch of the recent bus service that links the two countries together, and highlighted that this means that the distance between Kashgar and Lahore has also decreased. Indeed, the roads being built will bring Pakistan closer to Kyrgyzstan, reducing travel time, while the latter will also have access to seaports in Karachi and Gwadar. Step by step, he concluded, the infrastructure is growing and CPEC is becoming the sort of network that will enable such connectivity to take place. He wished complete success to the aims of CPEC.

H.E. Mr. Sherali Jononov, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan began his talk by lauding the timing of the seminar since the ongoing processes in the Central Asian Republics had opened up new opportunities for Pakistan. Highlighting the recent and ongoing positive developments for Pakistan due to the focus on trade, energy, railways, transport, transit and connectivity, he noted that Central Asia and Pakistan had deep historical, spiritual, religious, and cultural ties. Pakistan was, after all, part of the historic Silk Road, giving an idea of what to focus on in future.

Ambassador Jononov reminded the audience that when in 2014 the leadership of Pakistan was welcomed in Dushanbe, Tajikistan had also officially welcomed CPEC as a key project for connectivity and new change to develop the region. He emphasized that the country's position on Pakistan and regional connectivity was that the country is important in terms of trade and economic opportunities, and due to its position in the Islamic world. This is why Tajikistan values its relationship with Pakistan. It is thus that Pakistan and Tajikistan are strategic partners as the two have improved their relations in areas of energy, defence, security, transport and trade.

Ambassador Jononov noted that one of the most important areas in which there is cooperation between Pakistan and Tajikistan is energy, including the CASA-1000 project through which Pakistan will receive 1000 MW of energy. On November 16, 2018, the first stage of Tajikistan's power station at Rogun has been launched, that will add another 1600 MW to the project. Energy

has become such an important aspect of the relationship that the two countries have set up a joint group on energy, and three meetings have already been held in Dushanbe.

The second aspect of the relationship, Ambassador Jononov continued, is connectivity. In this regard, the President of Tajikistan had come to Pakistan in November 2015 and discussed railways and roads, including two corridors that can connect Tajikistan and Pakistan. The third aspect of the relationship that the Ambassador highlighted was trade, and he noted that due to the security situation in Afghanistan, the trade volume is currently low. However, a working group on trade had also been set up and there are discussions to sign an agreement on transit trade, which is very important.

Ambassador Jononov concluded his talk by noting that Tajikistan has a 1,500 km long border with Afghanistan and thus there are close ties with Pakistan regarding the avenue of defense and security. He suggested some proposals such as establishing various forums for trade, or developing South Asia-Central Asia centres for study as possible avenues to enhance relations, and noted that there has been progress already on connecting the two countries through regular flights for trade, tourism, and people to people contact, thus ending his discussion on a positive note.

H.E. Mr. Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Republic of Turkmenistan thanked the ISSI for organizing the seminar. He spoke about the transport and connectivity projects in Turkmenistan and said that in the first years of independence, the leadership of Turkmenistan gave special attention to building infrastructure and connectivity in the region. In this regard, Turkmenistan supports the Istanbul Process for confidence building measures regarding urban development and connectivity. He reminded the audience that some important infrastructure projects have already been implemented by Turkmenistan. In 1996, Russia, Central Asia and Iran were connected via construction of 132 km railway. In 1999, the railway line from Turkmenabad to other regions was laid down. In 2006, Trans-Karakum railway spanning 540 km linked Turkman capital Ashkhabad to northern province that reduced the travel time by half. In 2014, Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway became part of our northern front transport corridor, and in 2016, a railway line till the border of Afghanistan has been commissioned and it is a second line commissioned from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan. It is

worth noting that it is the first Asian transport corridor between Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan.

In 2016, the new international airport in Turkmen capital was commissioned. In May 2018, Turkmenistan international sea port was inaugurated. This port will be the main point for large logistics hub in the region. Since 2017, two main bridges over the Amu Darya river are also being built in Turkmenistan. At the initiative of President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, 2018 has been declared as the "Heart of Grand Silk Road Turkmenistan". This initiative flowed from the concept of modern development of Turkmenistan based on historical experience, integration in global economy and social progress.

Ambassador Movlamov said that Turkmenistan is located at the crossroad of most important transport corridors connecting Asia and Europe. Based on the historical experience of the great Silk Road, Turkmenistan is evolving today in a new capacity and energy, thus creating new opportunities for international transport corridors. These corridors are multi directional. Turkmenistan is also part of Russian initiative that involves Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Azerbaijan- Georgian-Turkey, as well as the Central Asian-Middle East corridors which provide inter-regional connectivity between these countries. He was of the view that nowadays, connectivity in any of its form like pipelines, maritime and road transportation is linked to political economy and politics of the region and which describes international processes depending upon political and economic agenda of the nations.

In this context, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) energy bridge is being promoted by Turkmenistan along with other projects with the aim of stabilizing the regions. TAPI is now enriched with more expanded content as it also contains plans for fiber optics line, railways and highways. Ambassador Movlamov said that Turkmenistan has always shown commitment to participate in the realm of global transport. Moreover, Turkmenistan is ready to step up and expand dialogue in this area and filling it with new specific projects. He said that Turkmenistan sees Central Asia as an integrated and essential part of modern development processes in which the silk road of the 21st century will be a game changer in future. Constructive proposals by the leadership of Turkmenistan are supported by the world community and it was proven by a unanimous adoption of a resolution in the region for social development and sustainable progress. Integration into the world logistic system will further the expansion of

infrastructure in east and west, and in north-south direction in the near future. These land corridors are important in the context of connection to international transport system entering into China, India, Pakistan and other Asian-Pacific countries. The idea of creating a bigger form of cooperation is in itself an example of enlightened thinking in geopolitics and development. Concluding his remarks, Ambassador Movlamov expressed his confidence that regional transport and transit corridors will further strengthen trade and economy in the region and improve the current situation in all spheres.

H.E. Mr. Furqat Sidiqov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan remarked that Uzbekistan understands the importance of Pakistan in maintaining stability and prosperity in the region. He said that we are interested in continuing our partnership in all areas like regional security, conflict resolution in Afghanistan and expansion of infrastructure and trade between Central Asia and Pakistan. He emphasized the positive results of a recent visit by Uzbek delegation headed by its foreign minister on November 1, 2018, and expressed his gratitude to the Pakistani government for organizing this visit. During this visit, he said, the leadership of Pakistan was offered a project to set up a trilateral trade and infrastructure commission between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. This project will include a massive railroad and transport corridor between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. The corridor will compose of a rail line which already lies between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, as well as construction of new railroad between Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul and Peshawar. In this perspective, Pakistan can help Uzbekistan to connect with the Middle East.

He informed the audience that Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan fully supports these logistic plans and that we are highly grateful to the leadership of Pakistan for their generous support. Construction of this corridor was also stated in the official address of Uzbek President to the Pakistani Prime Minister in October 2018. In his official letter, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev offered to strengthen bilateral relationship and multilateral cooperation to create most favorable trade and logistic conditions in the region. The amount involved in this project is more than 3 billion dollars and spans several 100 kilometers and should be completed by 2020. Uzbek neighborhoods, including Russia, supports this initiative by Uzbekistan, and the railway authorities of Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan will meet in Tashkent in December 2018 to discuss this project. He said that we look forward to an active participation by Pakistani

delegation there. Explaining the importance of this, project, Ambassador Sidiqov said that he was confident that it can resolve the problem of connectivity between these countries and will be helpful in accessing Pakistani sea ports of Karachi and Gwadar. He said that Uzbekistan is carrying out infrastructural and other projects in the region. With Afghanistan, we will start railway projects at a cost of 2 billion dollars. Uzbekistan also transports electricity to Afghanistan, and from January 2019, we want to bring that electricity to Pakistan. We also support CASA 1000 project as part of our good neighborhood policy. We also support TAPI, and Uzbekistan will become part of this mega project. Moreover, future energy projects can be linked up with CPEC and which can connect Pakistan with Central Asia.

Speaking about Uzbekistan-Pakistan bilateral relationship, Ambassador Sidiqov said that we are opening direct flights from Karachi to Tashkent and from Islamabad to Tashkent, and we will be able to fly from Islamabad to Tashkent in one hour. He was of the opinion that it would be good if there is frequent travelling between the two countries, which will be helpful in expanding business and trade. He said that our trade with Pakistan is increasing, in 2016 our trade volume was 36 million dollars, and now in 2018, this volume has expanded to more than 90 million dollars. He was confident that by the end of 2018, we will end up with more than 100 million dollars and in next four years this trade is expected to be more than 300 million dollars. Uzbekistan is the biggest economic partner of Pakistan and in 2018, we have opened twenty-five joint ventures and this is just the beginning. He thanked the ISSI for providing him with the opportunity to address the seminar.

Chairman BOG ISSI Ambassador (Retd.) Khalid Mahmood in his concluding remarks said that speakers in the seminar had given valuable perspectives on the importance of CPEC in forging global cooperation and integration in trade, economy, energy and infrastructure.

He was of the view that after the end of World War II during the Cold War period, interstate relations were dominated by the security paradigm and this was the age of military alliances and securitization of even domestic policies. After the end of the Cold War, the focus shifted to social security and globalization. He said that the security paradigm is getting uncertain now, with Trumpian policies of unilateralism and coercion emerging as important paradigm, and these two models of interstate relations are now jostling and competing with each other. He suggested that an alternate model that emphasises social economic development is epitomised by the

visionary BRI initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping. It underscores that in the contemporary world, harmonizing economic interests is more important than ideologies in defining relations among states.

Ambassador Mahmood continued that land-locked and resource rich Central Asian Republics require improved access to regional markets including Pakistan, China, India and others. Pakistan and China have energy needs that can be met by Central Asia. So there is great complementarity of interests. BRI comprises six land corridors and one maritime Silk Road that can help in realizing this potential. Central Asian Republics have a geographical location that is conducive for both BRI and CPEC, but CPEC has an obvious advantage. It provides the land-locked states the shortest access to sea and is fastest in its progress as compared to other corridors. As regards Pakistan's significance in CPEC, he highlighted that this is central, but he also noted several impediments in the way that need to be addressed, such as the insecurity in Afghanistan, non-availability of air linkages between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, strict visa regimes, outdated banking systems, lack of understanding of local trading systems and the language barrier. These difficulties must be addressed by all stakeholders. He said that there are no disputes existing between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics and in fact they share deep-rooted religious and cultural links and cooperate with each other in multilateral organizations. In order to reap the benefits from CPEC, he concluded, Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics need to intensify efforts to realize regional integration and success of CPEC.