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Report – In-House Meeting

“Visit of Sichuan University Delegation”

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China-Pakistan Study Center (CPSC), at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), hosted an In-house meeting with an 8-Member Delegation from Sichuan University. The delegation was headed by Professor Yan Shijing, Vice President of the Sichuan University. Earlier, China Centre for South Asian Studies (CCSAS) at the Sichuan University and Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between the Institute and the Centre. The MoU was signed by Professor Sun Shihai, Director General of CCSAS and Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General of ISSI.

The purpose of this discussion was to exchange views on matters of mutual interest including Pakistan-China relations, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and regional environment so that ideas could be generated for future collaboration. Participants included: Professor Sun Shihai, Professor Song Zhihui, Professor Huang Yunsong, Professor Zhang Li, Dr. Xiao Jianmei, Professor Yang Guang, and Professor Du Youkang.

Director China Pakistan Study Centre, Dr. Talat Shabbir briefed the delegation about the aims and objectives of China-Pakistan Study Centre. He said that the centre has been established for under-taking research, consultancy and advocacy concerning China-Pakistan relations. CPSC focuses on culture, tourism, economy, and people to people linkages. Dr. Shabbir briefed the delegation on current state of China Pakistan Economic Corridor and prospects for collaboration between the two countries in second phase of CPEC. He raised many constructive points such as narrative-building for CPEC, adapting Chinese development models for socio-economic development and joint research projects with Chinese think-tanks.

Professor Yan Shijing, Vice President of Sichuan University introduced his colleagues and thanked the institute for hosting them. He said that Sichuan University is one of the top-ranking university of China and many Pakistani students are enrolled there. Moving to China Centre for South Asian Studies (CCSAS) Mr. Shijing said that the centre was established in 2017. The centre produce more than 100 research papers on annual basis and we also encourage Pakistani students to contribute. Concluding, he stressed that both centres should explore joint research possibilities and establish closer relationship by organizing workshops, conferences and seminars.

Professor Sun Shihai, Director General Centre for South Asian Studies (CCAS) gave a brief over-view of his centre. He said that the centre was authorized by central government and is the only centre for regional studies. The centre has wide range of cooperation with think-tanks, specially Pakistan Study Centres across China. CCAS primarily focuses on policy inputs on South Asian affairs. Like strategic, political, economic and cultural issues. It majorly focuses on regional security, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC and Pakistan-China relations. Professor Shihai stressed to explore more areas for collaboration and said that both countries should adopt an inclusive approach.

Professor Song Zhihui stated that their centre is bringing Chinese investors and traders to Pakistan and finding areas to cooperate. He said that many MoUs for cooperation with Pakistani companies have been signed. Mr. Zhihui said that their focus is relocation of industries. He told the audience that Chinese industrialists are very eager to visit Pakistan and explore avenues for cooperation. He emphasized on improving tourism industry of Pakistan. Summing up he said that industrialization, direct flights and tourism industry should be the key-focus under second phase of CPEC.

Professor Du Youkang stressed on a constant exchange of dialogues and research collaborations between ISSI, Pakistan Study Center at Fudan University and other think-tanks from China. Moving to CPEC he stressed that there is a need to tackle both internal and external challenges facing CPEC and for that joint seminars, conferences and policy inputs should be prepared. Apart from this, recent issues should be focused upon and western hostility towards CPEC should also be considered.

Professor Huang Yunsong stated that China has been very active in shaping the architecture in South Asian security especially after President Xi Jinping came to power and after the initiation of BRI. Candidly, he opined that India still plays a dominant role in South Asia with regards to security architecture. US and Russia have tried to pitch in from some angles but their efforts were not fruitful. He further said that during the process of China's initiative to play a key-role in the region we will learn from their lessons and our arch principle is to stay away from regional politics and will continue doing so. With regards to Pakistan China relations he said that there is a deficiency when it comes to future security architecture in South-Asian region. China is trying

to construct an inclusive and constructive strategy which should be beneficial for all the stakeholders in the region and beyond. He hoped that with joint efforts Pakistan will become a strong nation in these dynamics. There is a need to strengthen momentum for economic and social development. He also stated that external powers are playing an increasing role in the region but at the same time role of China is increasing therefore it would be better if the role of external powers is prevented. He further said we do not want to play an exclusive role in the region. Concluding he said, in terms of regional security some factors need to be considered and deliberated upon like Indian hostility towards Indian Muslims and we would really like to see and help Pakistan to cope with these challenges.

Professor Zhang Li said that Afghanistan and Pakistan play a central role in influencing the regional situation and situation in Afghanistan. He opined that although external and regional powers have played their role to bring peace and stability back in Afghanistan but the situation still is uncertain and disruption still exists. He asked the CPSC team what do you think is the crux of this matter in the process of reconciliation process. US and Pakistan are major stakeholders in Afghan peace process. What is the difference and where do you think peace talks in Afghanistan are heading to?

Replying to the question, Mr. Muhammad Faisal, Research Fellow CPSC-ISSI said that at this very moment Pakistan is hoping for direct talks between the U.S and Taliban that are result oriented and will lead to a cease-fire. The progress in international negotiations will lead to Intra-Afghan talks. Unless Intra-Afghan talks are there any agreement reached between the two Taliban and the US will not be implementable. That's where Pakistan's interest lies. Nonetheless Pakistan does not want to be a part of Intra-Afghan dialogue, it can facilitate it but wants to remain out of it. Pakistan believes that it should be an Afghan owned and Afghan led process. This is where it differs from US stance. But even if an agreement is finally reached between Taliban and US; the question is can Taliban actually trust US side to abide by an agreement when President Trump pulls out of talks through a tweet or statement. So suspicion and scepticism exists from the Taliban side towards U.S.

There was consensus among the participants, both Chinese and Pakistani on working on regional security matters, expanding relations with other countries outside the region and for joint

research projects, exchange programs and a lot more. Chinese side considered the interactive session very fruitful and said that now is the time to shift the gear to actual work on ground and take practical measures on the pressing concerns facing both China and Pakistan. They emphasized on conducting joint research and providing pragmatic policy input to the governments. Enhancing the skills of domestic labor force, capacity-building and developing a culture of research and scholarly discussions among the two countries was also underlined.

Concluding the discussion, Dr. Talat Shabbir thanked the participants for sharing their practical and constructive ideas on matters of mutual interest. He hoped for cooperation in various other avenues and stated that the joint efforts and collaborations between Pakistani and Chinese scholars will benefit both the countries.

PICTURES OF THE EVENT



