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Report- In-House Meeting
With Chinese Delegation
from
**China Institutes of International Relations (CICIR),
Beijing**

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Pictures of the Event



Meeting with Chinese Delegation from CICIR

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held an In-House discussion on April 20, 2016 with a five-member delegation from the China Institutes of International Relations (CICIR), Beijing. The delegation was led by Mr. Fu Mengzi, Vice President of the CICIR. Other members of the delegation included: Mr. Ni Jianjun; Mr. Wang Shida; Mr. Zhang Xinbo; and Lin Yiming.

Other guest at the meeting included: Mr Khalid Rehman, DG, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, Brig (Retd.) Maqsood ul Hasan, Dean of Management Sciences, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Air Marshal (Retd.) Farhat Hussain Khan, Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Faaiz Amir, Vice Chancellor, Air University, Islamabad, and Dr Azhar Ahmad of Bahria University, Islamabad.

Ambassador Masood Khan, Director General ISSI, warmly welcomed the delegation and said that CICIR is a leading think tank of China. He reminded Mr. Fu Mengzi of the visit to ISSI by a CICIR delegation in 2015, and said that the delegation had a very rewarding interaction with other institutes and organisations during this visit. He emphasised Pakistan's deep-rooted ties with China, and said that these relations are very strong and robust.

Mr Fu Mengzi said that he was very happy to be in Islamabad. He highlighted the strong strategic ties that existed between Pakistan and China and the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its various aspects including the challenges and opportunities. He said that Pakistan is a very friendly country, and China enjoyed a long friendship with the country. He highlighted Pakistan's geo-strategic importance and said that he wanted to know the perspectives of the participants on CPEC.

The participants said that there is a need to tackle the counter narrative on the CPEC. They said that confrontation in South China Sea would be harmful for peace and stability in the region and for a smooth implementation of the 'One Belt One Road' and the CPEC. The importance of CPEC was highlighted as a vital project for the economy of Pakistan. They suggested that besides strategic cooperation and CPEC, other aspects of mutual relations should also be pursued.

Mr Khalid Rehman talked about narratives and moves that have been generated at grass-root level to damage the deep-rooted trust between Pakistan and China and the CPEC. He said that there are many surveys that show deep and friendly relations between the two countries.

Air Vice Marshall (Retd.) Faaiz Amir said the CPEC has been primarily projected as an economic corridor of opportunities for both countries. He said that he saw the CPEC as the extension of the South China Sea conflict in the Cold War perspective. He talked about the South China Sea tension and its implications, which have security concerns and instability for Pakistan to some extent because of the CPEC. External forces are not happy to see China get away from the Malacca Straits and built the CPEC.

Dr. Azhar Ahmad was of the view that CPEC always overtakes other discussions of Pakistan's relations with China. He said Pakistan was very optimistic about the CPEC and wanted to know how Chinese think of the CPEC, and about the momentum we have achieved so far.

Air Marshall (Retd.) Farhat Hussain Khan was of the view that Pakistan's relations with China are time-tested and they will continue to grow despite opposition. He highlighted his own role as Air Force officer to built aviation links with China. Relations, he said, grow out of commonality of interests. He asked about other horizons and common areas that could cement their relations, and which need to be explored.

Brigadier (Retd) Maqsood ul Hasan mentioned about Chinese Studies, Chinese language teaching, and the Confucius Institute at NUML University. He said that the CPEC is a project of great magnitude with far-reaching strategic dimensions. It is going to impact upon Pakistan and China positively. There is counter narrative of every move, and asked what counter narratives China is expecting from global and regional powers on the CPEC and how to neutralise them and handle them?

Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik highlighted the significance of the CPEC. He said that the package of US\$ 46 billion is a great opportunity for investing in Pakistan. He said that this package is almost half of the loans contracted by Pakistan over the last 60 years. The package is going to transform the economy of Pakistan, its infrastructure, and industry and all sectors. Since the package was offered to Pakistan two years ago, Pakistani economy is showing signs of improvement. He pointed out that FDI has been increasing in Pakistan and many countries have shown interest to participate in CPEC projects. He opined that constraints are always there with any project, but there are always strategies to handle them.

Mr Wang Shida giving his viewpoint on the CPEC, pointed out that it is the flagship project of the 'One Belt One Road' initiative and they expected the completion of the early harvest projects by 2018. He said that Pakistan is the only reliable ally of China in the world. He was satisfied about the progress made on the CPEC compared to other projects of the 'Belt and Road' like the BCIM project. In two years, he said, concrete progress was made on the CPEC. He said there are at least two seminars on the CPEC in

China every month and many institutes focus on the CPEC in China. There are good feelings about the future of CPEC in China, he said. He talked about the security threats and geo-politics in the region.

Mr Zhang Xinbo gave a detail account of the strategic confrontation and tension in the South China Sea. China oil imports come from the Malacca Straits; and when the CPEC will be built it will reduce time and money for China to import via Gwadar. Besides geo-political complications, CPEC will make new transformation for China, he said. The South China Sea and CPEC are not interconnected. They are separate issues. The American presence in the South China Sea is not an old issue and China wants to avoid confrontation with the United States. In his view, the South China Sea situation is not so dangerous since there are no territorial claims by America in the region. The CPEC is not a reflection of China-US confrontation in South China Sea, he opined.

Mr. Lin Yiming largely talked about the security and domestic political issues related to the CPEC. Security is the basic concern, he said. He said that China is confident of Pakistan's future and they need to further cement ties. He said that security is an issue and without security, we cannot complete any project. He asked how to coordinate among the provinces for building the CPEC keeping in mind tension between the centre and provinces.

Mr. Fu Mengzi said that Pakistan and China will promote their relations from the CPEC point of view. He said that India is not happy over the CPEC as it goes, in its point of view, from the disputed territory of Kashmir. He talked about the unique geographic location of Pakistan. He said that Pakistan should take benefits of its geographic location in building the CPEC. He also mentioned competition between Gwadar and the Iranian Port of Chabahar.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman, Board of Governors of ISSI, said that the CPEC is important project of the OBOR to built roads and maritime connections, and the Gwadar Port will meet both demands of land and maritime connections. He said that the CPEC has overcome weak economic contents and weak people-to-people relations that existed between Pakistan and China in the past. He disagreed that the CPEC is overtaking other types of relations. He said that the CPEC is just reinforcing these relations. He put aside Indian objections and other concerns related to the CPEC. India, he said, has larger differences with Pakistan. It is just an excuse that the CPEC will go through the disputed territory of Kashmir. India just wants to subvert the CPEC. Any big project is bound to confront challenges, and so will the CPEC. This is not unusual. The CPEC has achieved national consensus, and there is agreement that that it should be people-centric. Government is aware of this and taking measures in this regard. He was of the opinion that other countries will join the CPEC after early harvest

projects were built. We do not need to be distracted, and should remain fully committed to the project.

Ambassador Masood Khan, while concluding the meeting, said that the CPEC has grown out of Pakistan-China mutual ties and besides the CPEC, defence and strategic ties between the two countries are strong. People-to-people and citizens' exchanges and interactions between the think tanks should be increased as they are not as frequent as they need to be. He said that the Chinese side should not indulge in domestic politics in Pakistan as it is very messy. Pakistanis can handle its domestic political issues, he assured. Political parties have no disagreements among them about friendship with China. The CPEC must go through urban centres first. It can then go to remote areas. China has included funds for the CPEC in its current five-year plan. He said that some people in Pakistan think that the CPEC is a substitute for the economic development of Pakistan, which it is not because China is not responsible for the development of the under-developed areas of Pakistan. The CPEC is growing out of China-Pakistan relationship, which is strong and robust over the years and decades. He said that propaganda from some quarters tries to create negative stereotypes about Pakistan and China, but the ties of the two countries are strong and resilient that can absorb the shocks to advance their shared agenda. Western media pollutes Pakistani mind against China and vice versa. As Pakistan is fighting the war against terrorism, there are some security risks. He emphasised that all political parties are in favour of the CPEC. He cautioned that Indians would continue to object to the CPEC. Pakistan should brush aside these objections to implement the CPEC. India opposes not only CPEC, but the OBOR as well. They are not interested in the BCIM either. He said that Chinese navy is far ahead of the Indian navy, and will grow strongly in the strategic field. He concluded by stating that both Pakistanis and Chinese are iron brothers and that feeling is anchored in the hearts and minds of both the people and also the generations to come. Under given circumstances, he opined that the CPEC would succeed in achieving its objectives along with the OBOR.