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# *Report – In-House Meeting*

## **“Thai Media Delegation”**

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## Pictures of the Event







The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held an In-House meeting with a 6-member Media Delegation from Thailand on July 4, 2018. The members of the delegation included: Dr. Rungthip Chotnapalai, News Anchor, Thai TV, Channel-3; Mr. Tanoopon Noonual, Cameraman, Channel-3; Ms. Watcharin Setakudan, Journalist, Producer, News Presenter and Editor-in-Chief, Thai News Agency; Ms. Wonkanok Sangkrajang, Cameraman, Thai News Agency; Thiptawan Teeranaipong, International News Reporter, Thai Public Broadcasting Service; and Mr. Malit Khamnan, Cameraman, Thai Public Broadcasting Service.

The Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry welcomed the Thai media delegation and introduced members of ISSI team to them. Ambassador Aizaz said that bilateral ties between Pakistan and Thailand are cordial and the economic relationship is steadily growing. The Director General was of the view that there are a number of areas that are common between the two countries like tourism and cultural heritage. He said that Gandhara heritage joins the two countries together.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry briefly talked about the regional and international security environment. He said that Pakistan's most serious challenge since its inception and especially over the last decade or so has been security. He maintained that the roots of Pakistan's contemporary security problem lies in the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as both US and Russia left the region with militant movements and organisations intact. He said that Pakistan sided with international community after 9/11 and thus faced the wrath of militant violence.

Detailing Pakistan's sacrifices in its war against terrorism, Ambassador Chaudhry said that there was a time when terrorist attacks were happening on nearly a daily basis, but the nation got together and a national consensus was reached that violent extremism and terrorism are intolerable. As a result of this consensus, Ambassador Chaudhry argued, Pakistan conducted the most successful counter terrorism operations in its volatile tribal regions which have been a no go area for Government for decades.

Pakistan gave enormous sacrifices both monetary and loss of lives to fight this menace and the people are content that as a result the terrorist violence has drastically reduced in recent years and the economic climate is greatly improved as well. He said that now the terrorists have fled to

neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan is pressing upon the US that both countries need to work together to end this menace.

The Director General said Pakistan is well on its path to democratic progress and consolidation as third consecutive transition will occur after the July 25 general elections. Another strong area for Pakistan is its natural resources and youthful population and on balance the nation is upbeat.

Returning to the regional situation, Ambassador Chaudhry said that Pakistan's strongest relationship is with China. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) did not emerge suddenly, but was a product of a process in China where President Xi wanted to change the growth model to domestic spending model. Ambassador Chaudhry added that Chinese also faced the dilemma about the vulnerability and distance of sea routes that supply them the energy imported from the Middle East and Pakistan is an alternate supply route for China.

Regarding India, Ambassador Chaudhry said that Pakistan's relationship with its eastern neighbor have never been cordial. India has its own way of dealing with its neighbors and the current situation is that both India and Pakistan are not talking to each other. Ambassador Chaudhry maintained that this is not a wise approach. He said that India accuses Pakistan of harboring anti-India elements that conduct terrorist activities, but we say in response that Pakistan is itself the biggest victim of terrorism and continued Indian hostilities gives life to militants. Ambassador Chaudhry was of the view that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is emboldened because of changing broader dynamics of the region whose prominent feature is the growing US-India strategic relationship. He apprised the Thai delegation about horrific human rights violations in the Indian held Kashmir and heavy handed approach by the Indian government under which even the vast minorities in India including Muslims, Christians and Buddhists are not spared from violence.

On Afghanistan, Ambassador Chaudhry said that Afghanistan remains a major challenge both for Pakistan and the international community as even after seventeen years of war, the country remains the base of terrorism. US came into Afghanistan due to the terrorism factor, but the situation today is that approximately half of Afghanistan is not in control of international forces and the objectives set forth post 9/11 have not been met. Ambassador Chaudhry cautioned that

the entire region will be effected if the Afghan situation is not stabilized and Pakistan is in conversation with US about these concerns.

Ambassador Chaudhry concluded his remarks by briefly explaining the major shifts in global politics. He said that major power strategic competition has made a comeback after the Cold War. The Trump administration now operates with the vision of “America First” which threatens the post-World War II order and its institutions. Narrow nationalism and racism is rising in the world. He said that both Russia and China have reacted negatively to policy impulses from the US and if these major power enter into a conflict then all the countries will suffer. He emphasized that this is the arena where the role of media and think tanks becomes important whereby they can bridge the gaps and generate common understanding about world issues.

The Thai media delegation in their remarks praised the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) for hosting them. The delegation was of the view that they are learning about Pakistan, its culture and foreign policy in their first ever trip to the country and institutes like ISSI have enhanced their thinking about Pakistan and its regional role.

In response to a question about the effect of CPEC in Pakistan, its potential benefits and concerns, Ambassador Chaudhry said that when CPEC was envisaged in 2013, it created some anxiety abroad and much disinformation was churned out by sponsored elements. One of those key sponsored idea was that CPEC will create debt burden that will be unbearable for Pakistan. He said that if you see the facts on ground, it becomes clear that debt is not an issue because the idea was that Chinese investments will enable Pakistan’s private sector to pay back the portion of investments that comes in the form of loan. Infrastructure is the area where people of Pakistan have benefitted, especially in Baluchistan, due to CPEC. Moreover, Pakistan’s energy woes are now solved to a large extent because of CPEC related energy projects. He also said that CPEC has opened many opportunities for the region, especially Afghanistan and Central Asia, to get more integrated and connected so we need to take a balanced view on the subject. Mr Faisal, a researcher at ISSI’s China Study Centre, added that at the local level Pakistani labor is being hired and employed to complete many CPEC related projects. He said that CPEC also envisages upgradation of Pakistan’s railway infrastructure that will be a big boost for its economy.

In answering the question about the lessons that Thailand can learn from Pakistan regarding countering extremism and terrorism, Ambassador Chaudhry said that Pakistan has a wealth of experience in dealing with these issues and that he is aware about presentations made by Thai and Philippines delegations in the OIC regarding their Muslim populations. Pakistan believes that changing the mindset that generates violent extremism is critical because use of force never actually solves the problem in a comprehensive manner. We need to engage people in order to bridge the gaps and improve perceptions.

A question was asked about Pakistan's image abroad and the steps it is doing to ensure the economic well-being of its people. Ambassador Chaudhry said that perception of Pakistan and reality are two different things. He said that Pakistan's detractors will pose a negative image of Pakistan and create misperceptions and the role of media is important in this regards. The news about the country should not be the sole criteria for evaluating countries where small issues become major headlines, he added. He was of the view that people-to-people contact with the outside world is key to generating the real image and delegation visits like these are of real value. Regarding the economic well-being of the people, Director Research ISSI Mr. Najam Rafique added that rich and poor will always be there in countries, but the important matter is whether the wealth is concentrated in few hands or its evenly distributed. He said that now with the democratic process in Pakistan well on its way, governments have ensured continuity of the uplift and prosperity of the people through creation and provision of jobs, education and health facilities embedded in their 5-year plans. Ambassador Chaudhry added that the former government of Pakistan also had a plan to reduce poverty and improve education through its Vision 2030 document.

Ambassador Chaudhry asked the delegation about various high profile military manoeuvres and disputes in South China Sea and how does Thailand sees them. The delegation replied that Thailand is neutral in the regional disputes and these kinds of major power disputes do not affect them and that ASEAN is the forum which collectively deals with these complex issues.

Chairman BOG ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood in his concluding remarks said that the discussion has been fruitful and he also welcomed the Thai delegation to Pakistan. The Chairman said that the overall bilateral relations between Pakistan and Thailand are cordial and economic

interactions are increasing. He said that Pakistan is also looking to expand its interaction with South East Asian region, particularly ASEAN, as part of its “Vision East Asia” policy and it highly appreciate Thailand’s support for this policy.

The Thai delegation said that it is their pleasure to visit a beautiful country of Pakistan and they are impressed by the information given to them by the Institute on contemporary issues. The delegation remarked that Pakistan has a rich cultural heritage and natural resources and our two countries can join hands and make use of them. The delegation emphasized the importance of people-to-people contacts and wished Pakistan a good future.