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Report - In-House Meeting
with
6-Member Maldives Delegation

December 26, 2018



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISS) hosted an In-House Meeting with a 6-member delegation from Pakistan-Maldives Friendship Association on December 26, 2018. The delegation was led by Dr. Ibrahim Zakariyya Moosa, Dean of Centre for Post Graduate Studies. Other members of the delegation included: Shaikh Muhammad Faiz, Director, Islamic University of Maldives; Mr. Abdul Shakoor, Businessman; Mr. Abdul Muhusin Moosa, Businessman; Mr. Hassan Saeed, Businessman; and Mr. Muhammad Nasih, represented Government of Maldives. The visit of the delegation to Pakistan was organized by Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC). Mr. Najam Rafique, Director (Research) led the briefing and welcomed the delegation to ISSI.

At the outset, Ms. Mahrukh Khan, Research Fellow, gave an overview of the Institute to the delegation, and explained the genesis of ISSI; its main goals, the focus of its research and outreach activities. To a question, Mr. Najam Rafique stated that while the ISSI is linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is registered as an autonomous body and sets its own research agenda. The delegates expressed interest in benefitting from research work undertaken the Institute.

Dr. Moosa appreciated the work being done by ISSI. He noted that the delegation is looking to explore educational opportunities for Maldivian students as they have heard positive views about higher education institutes of Pakistan. He underscored that the delegation had been afraid of visiting Pakistan, but their apprehensions have proven to be wrong. He noted that the image of Pakistan in global media is negative and it is crucial to improve the image. Mr. Najam Rafique while agreeing with Dr. Moosa highlighted that Pakistan has undertaken several counter-terrorism operations to defeat the scourge of terrorism and eradicating militancy from the country. Resultantly, the security situation has improved to a great extent and scenic Northern Areas of Pakistan have now begun attracting international tourists.

Mr. Najam Rafique gave a brief overview of regional security situation with reference to Pakistan's relations with India and Afghanistan. He noted that India seeks regional hegemony in South Asia and the Kashmir dispute is at the core of India-Pakistan conflict. India has consistently refused dialogue with Pakistan to resolve issues including the Kashmir dispute. Meanwhile, involvement of major powers in Afghanistan has also complicated political and

security situation for Pakistan and the region. The on-going conflict in Afghanistan is far from being resolved. Recently, a peace and reconciliation process has been started and Pakistan welcomes and support initiatives for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

As for the international political scenario, he noted that global politics is undergoing a sea-change. In recent decades, besides nation-states new actors have emerged to influence international politics. These includes multi-national corporations, civil society organizations, and, non-state actors. Meanwhile, new issues such as climate change and trade wars are at the centre of international political debates.

Mr. Abdul Shakoor agreed with the Director and noted that environmental studies is a crucial component of curriculum from school to university level. Students are taught the significance and ways to protect environment as it is our source of livelihood.

Focusing on Pakistan's relationship with China, Mr. Najam underscored the importance of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for the economy of Pakistan. He noted that CPEC is focusing on addressing Pakistan's energy shortfall and improve infrastructure linkages within the country.

The delegation members asked questions about the nature of Chinese investment in Pakistan and the questions of debt, and Pakistan's experience of balancing relations between China and the United States. They were informed that most of the Chinese financial commitments for CPEC are in the form of investments by Chinese companies. Out of the 22 projects under the first phase of CPEC, only 4 are being set up through loans and Pakistan would have no problems in terms of debt owed on them. However, there is a lot of negative propaganda on the issue of debt. Regarding relations with China and US, Mr. Najam said that the nature of Pakistan's ties with China is based on its special relationship with that country and is qualitatively different from its engagement with the United States. However, Pakistan believes in maintaining good relations with both the countries.

The discussion then turned towards situation in the Middle East. Mr. Najam briefly explained Pakistan's efforts to maintained neutrality in the Yemen conflict and also between its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran. He informed the delegation that Iran is a neighbour of Pakistan, while

with Saudi Arabia Pakistan has close political, economic and ideological ties. Pakistan strives for reconciliation among Muslim nations. The delegation appreciated the conduct of Pakistan's Middle East policy and underscored that they viewed it as a matter of pride that Pakistan took a principled position on rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The delegation members also expressed an interest in benefitting from Pakistan's successful counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation experience. Mr. Asadullah Khan, Research Fellow, gave an overview of Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy and strategies over recent years. He noted that Pakistan is open to sharing its experience with other nations as they can draw useful lessons for their policy-frameworks.

The delegation also raised a question regarding the future of Kashmir? Mr. Najam noted that Pakistan will continue to stand by its principle position on the Kashmir issue. It cannot abandon the cause of self-determination of the Kashmiris. He pointed out that Pakistan has time and again shown willingness to discuss and resolve the issue, but it is India which is hesitant to talk about Kashmir. And, it is also evident that India cannot occupy Kashmir through force forever.

The delegation also discussed measures for enhancing Pakistan-Maldives relations. Director Najam noted that focus should be on enhancing trade and people-to-people contact between two countries. Both countries had potential for expanding linkages between tourism industry, as both countries have a lot to share in this regard.

The delegation thanked the ISSI for hosting them and for a candid exchange of views on regional and international issues.