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Report – In-House Meeting

with

“Maldives Media Delegation”

December 16, 2019



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The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a 3-member Media Delegation from Maldives for an In-House meeting on December 16, 2019. Members of the delegation included: Mr. Farooq Mohamed Hassan, writer and journalist; Mr. Abdul Shakoor Adul Raheem, blogger; and Mr. Abdullah Mohamed, News producer, Channel-13.

Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Research at ISSI, welcomed the delegation and requested Ms. Shahroo Malik, Research Associate, to give a brief introduction of ISSI, its working and contribution to the strategic discourse, research and issues relevant to Pakistan.

Apprising the delegation on the dynamics of geostrategic environment in South Asia, Mr. Najam said that historic friendly relations between Pakistan and China have now been substantiated under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is now entering its second phase encompassing cooperation in the fields of agriculture, industry and education. He explained the recent unconstitutional steps taken by India on August 5 in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) dividing it into two separate Indian Union territories. He added that there is no chance of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. However, considering the hostile actions taken by India, chances of limited conventional war cannot be ruled out. He was of the view that India has strongly integrated herself within the US Indo-Pacific Strategy and in line with her hegemonic ambitions, will impose itself over the nations of Indian Ocean. Pakistan for its part, he continued, will continue to resist Indian hegemony in the region.

Mr. Najam said that under the Modi government, there has been a rise of fascism within India under the banner of Hindutva ideology. He said that this has implications not just within India, but for the entire region as well, particularly in the background where the Modi government has refused to restart the dialogue process with Pakistan. Instead, the Modi government has embarked upon a confrontationist approach towards Pakistan. Adding to the conversation, Mr. Najam said that another factor affecting peace in the region is the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan is a key player in the Afghan peace process and will keep playing its role in the establishment of peace in that country. He added that many fear that the results of the elections in September may lead Afghanistan into a civil war. He also touched upon the various non-traditional security threats confronting the region including climate change, food and water security.

Briefing the delegation about the working of China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at ISSI, Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC said that given the traditional warm and friendly relations between Pakistan and China, it is important to learn about various facets of this unique relationship and evolving regional and global scenarios. In this context, CPSC was established in 2007 and reinvigorated in 2016. He further said that CPSC aspires to be a centre of excellence devoted to strengthening relations between Pakistan and China through research and advocacy. The Centre provides policy inputs to the government of Pakistan on current and future directions of Pakistan-China relations.

Mr. Farooq from the Maldivian delegation raised a question about the propaganda and criticism on Belt and Road Initiative by Western countries and India. He further explained this phenomenon by quoting the debt trap, and asked how Pakistan is dealing with this type of perception? Responding to the question, Mr. Najam said that the criticism by Western and Indian circles on Chinese investments has less to do with the reality and more with propaganda. He explained that there are several ways in which China has opened up projects in Pakistan under CPEC. These include direct loans, grants and investments by Chinese companies. Loans have been provided on very nominal interest rates. Moreover, money owed to China forms only a small part of the total debt owed by Pakistan to other international institutions. Ways of investing such as direct investments, soft loans and joint projects are actually ways of helping each other rather than trapping. He also highlighted the fact that as a competitor to China, US is against the Chinese connectivity projects that seek to bring together some 3 billion people across Asia, Africa and Europe.

All the three delegates agreed to the suggestion put up by Mr. Najam that all the smaller South Asian states must resist pressure by India and work under the SAARC banner with Pakistan in order to develop trust and mutual respect for maximum benefits to the people in the region even if India chooses to stay out of these meetings.

Mr. Abdullah said that due to Indian influence in Maldives, progress between Pakistan and Maldives relations have slowed down, particularly under the present leadership in Maldives. He said that Pakistani media should expose India's game plan of hegemonic politics in the region.

He praised the existing media-to-media contacts between Pakistan and Maldives and hoped that this relationship between the two countries will strengthen.

Mr. Najam Rafique thanked the Maldivian delegation for the discussion and exchange of views on regional and international issues.

PICTURES OF THE EVENT

