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Report – Public Talk

“Darakht-e- Dosti, Epitomizing Pak-Iran Relationship: Celebrating Linguistic Linkages”

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The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held a Roundtable and Exhibition in collaboration with the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iran -Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies titled Darakht-e-Dosti, Epitomizing Pak-Iran Relationship: Celebrating Linguistic Linkages.

This event was held to commemorate the International Mother language day 2022.

The distinguished speakers included :Mr. Ehsan Khazaei, Cultural Counselor of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan, Dr. Habibollah Azimi, Former Head of the Manuscripts Department of the National Library of Iran; Ambassador Riffat Masood, former Pakistan Ambassador to Iran; Ambassador Asif Durrani, former Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran; Ambassador Abrar Hussain, former ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan; Mrs. Razia Akbar, Assistant Professor, Persian language & Literature, NUML; Dr Muzafar Ali Kashmiri , Professor of Persian language IIU and Dr Qandeel Abbas, Professor QAU.

Members of the diplomatic corps in Islamabad, academics, civil society, former and current diplomats, students and media personnel were also present.

During her introductory remarks, Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA said that in the evolution of Urdu as a language, there is considerable influence of the Persian dialect as Urdu mainly borrows its words and grammatical structures from Persian, with more than 60% of Persian words making up the language. Moreover, both languages are written in the Nasta'liq script. She went on to say that the influence of Persian on Urdu can be seen in the lyrics of Pakistan's National Anthem in which all the words are in Persian language except for the word "ka". Any mention of the linkages between Urdu and Persian would be incomplete without the significant contributions of Allama Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet, who produced almost 12,000 verses of poetry, out of which nearly 7,000 verses are written in Persian yet another visible example of the influence of the Persian language, she concluded.

A video clip depicting the workings of the Iran- Pakistan Institute of Persian studies was also shown on the occasion.

During his welcome remarks, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry stated that Farsi is like an old tree for us. The famous Pakistan poet Allama Iqbal's poetry is mostly in Farsi which is

evidence of the strong links Pakistan shares with Iran. He recounted the five years he spent in Iran during his service in the Foreign Office and expressed his happiness and appreciation that this event was taking place. Long live Pakistan-Iran friendship, he concluded.

During his remarks, H. E. Mr. Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan said that the Persian language is a common cultural heritage that does not belong only to Iran, but belongs to the whole region and must be honored and expanded to preserve cultural and identity values. He said for Pakistan, Persian has been one of the most important identifying elements as evident by the national anthem of Pakistan. He went to say that in addition, language and literature are important tools for better understanding the culture of Iran and Pakistan.

Mrs Razia Akbar said that Iran is a country which always stood by Pakistan. The two nations are not different from each other as they share strong cultural and linguistic linkages and their friendship is an example for the entire world. Pakistan and Iran are one soul but geographical infrastructures have divided us. The farsi language is prestigious and Urdu has nurtured within the roots of the farsi language and is derived from it. In fact, Islam entered the subcontinent through Iran, she said.

Mr. Ehsan Khazaei stated that Pakistan is unique in the terms of having a variety of manuscripts, especially Persian which reflect the relations and history between the two nations as well as the culture of the subcontinent. He said that there is immense capacity for joint cultural exchanges and dialogue . In order to strengthen the culture and relations between the two countries a dedicated education and culture center would help to achieve this goal.

Ambassador Riffat Masood stated that people in Iran know Allama Iqbal as ‘Iqbal Lahori,’ more than people in Pakistan. Farsi is a living language and is spoken across Pakistan in different varieties. Language and cultural aspects that bring people together are unfortunately discussed less. It is time to look at how we can enhance and strengthen these ties. Therefore, both countries should arrange a few cultural exchanges across the border. Television, media , books and magazines can help us exchange cultures and linguistic linkages are viable ways forward, she concluded.

Dr. Habibollah Azimi said it is important to carry out research so that manuscripts can be preserved. The accuracy of manuscripts is the best way to preserve the history of this region. The main issues in manuscript preservation are photocopies and setting of digital libraries. For decades, a number of Iranian and Pakistani scholars have identified the importance of manuscript catalogs. Due to scattering of manuscripts in different libraries it is difficult to revive them, he said.

Dr Kashmiri said that in order to increase Urdu-Farsi linkages, more academic linkages are needed. He ended his speech by saying, “you should cultivate the trees of friendship as this will give you happiness, but wherever you see a tree of evil you should gut it out”.

The diplomatic coordinator with Chief Minister Punjab also partook in the discussion and said that even though Pakistan and Iran are neighbours little is known about the cultural similarities on either side. Hence, more people to people contact needs to take place.

In reply to this Ambassador Hosseini stated that tourism should be increased not only for religious reasons but should also be extended to other avenues such as health tourism.

A speaker from the Allama Iqbal Open University suggested that there should be more academic MoUs between Pakistani institutions and their counterparts in Iran.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood related his experience in Iran as Ambassador. He stated that time and again Iran has supported Pakistan on many issues. Despite several ups and downs the relationship between two has remained strong. The farsi language has played a very important role in the bilateral linkage between Pakistan and Iran. More emphasis needs to be put on further cultivating existing cultural linkages. He also commended the work that was being done to preserve the old manuscripts and said that these are great asset that we should protect and value

The talk was followed by an exhibition of Persian manuscripts dating back to more than 1000 years that have been preserved at the Iran- Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies as well as various Iranian artifacts.