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PRESS RELEASE

ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

Pakistan's Global Profile: Priorities and Options



“Elections are won and lost, based not on ideologies, but on how a country’s economy is doing. This fact has played out in the United States and even in Pakistan.” This was stated by Prof. Dr. Javed Ashraf, Vice Chancellor, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, while addressing the conference titled “Pakistan’s Global Profile: Priorities and Options” organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) today. While it is easy to be an armchair critic, Pakistan’s current foreign reserves have increased, the Armed Forces with support of the government, have helped improve the law and order and security situation of the country.

Ambassador (ret'd) Sohail Amin, President, IPRI, in his opening remarks said that Pakistan has the 7th largest diaspora and the 9th largest labour force in the world. With the phenomenon of extended life expectancy, the aging populations in the industrialised world have increased. Pakistan's existing young population can play a major role by contributing towards the growing global workforce demands. Pakistan has remained one of the largest troops contributing countries for many years, which demonstrates its commitment to world peace. "At present, more than 7500 Pakistani troops are deployed in six UN mandated missions," he said.



Former Ambassador (R) Tariq Osman Hyder spoke on the "Role of Pakistani Diaspora in Enhancing Pakistan's Global Profile." He shared that remittances sent by those working abroad during 2014-15 were \$18,454.04 million, with an increase of 16.52 percent over the year before, despite the ongoing global recession. This financial year from July 2015 to May 2016, they are already sent \$17,831.62 million, with an increase of 5.58% over the year before. "It is clear that our diaspora's remittances are keeping our economy afloat," he said. The size of Pakistani diaspora is large enough to become a sociopolitical constituency in itself for the overall development of Pakistan. He was of the view that it is critical to protect the rights of all those who belong to our diaspora. More skillful diplomacy is needed to improve the living and work conditions of those abroad, especially in the GCC region. "The greatest service we

can provide is to massively improve education including vocational education and opportunities within Pakistan for the entire next generation who may seek other shores for temporary periods as this will in return enhance our representation abroad,” he concluded.

Discussing the ‘China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Prospects for Revival of Pakistan’s Economy’, Dr. Safdar A. Sohail, Executive Director CPEC Centre of Excellence, Planning Commission of Pakistan said that many of the structural bottlenecks faced by Pakistan such as low FDI in manufacturing; poor investment climate; low tax to GDP ratio; the 187\$ billion infrastructure deficit and even poor agricultural performance will be addressed through CPEC. He cautioned, however, that in order to attract investment in Pakistan and utilize the potentials of CPEC to the fullest, up-gradation of technology and infrastructure are crucial, alongwith serious policy push and resource mobilization. Energy is a major component of the early harvest projects of CPEC, he added, and shared that the government hopes to add ten thousand plus megawatts by 2018 to the national grids.

According to Mr Rahim Hayat Qureshi, Director General, Policy Planning and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared that the Ministry has recognised that cultural diplomacy programmes create forums for interaction between people of different countries, thus, laying the groundwork for the forging of friendships and strong ‘foundations of trust’ between people of different nationalities. Policy-makers can build on this trust to create political, economic, and military agreements. He said that the Ministry has been expanding its public diplomacy initiatives keeping in mind the lessons learnt over the last two years, with more focus on social and electronic media and economic diplomacy initiatives to redesign the soft image of Pakistan. He informed participants of specific cultural events undertaken at home and abroad. He also pointed out that the Ministry was trying to link these initiatives strategically with minimum utilisation of public money. “The Ministry and its Missions Abroad have been striving hard to highlight the positive narrative, projecting counter-terrorism efforts and the country as a stable democracy, a moderate and pluralistic society with vast economic potential and rich cultural heritage,” he said.

The revolution in communication and information technologies has led to the globalization of electronic communication and journalism, and contributed to a significant growth in the number of media consumers worldwide. Therefore, in today’s age, a country’s status in the international community is determined not only by military and economic power, but by a nation or leader’s image, values and control of information flow as well. These were the views of Dr Ishtiaq Ahmad, Director, School of Politics and IR, Quaid-i-Azam University. Media is a very strong tool in persuasion of public diplomacy.

Internet and social media are significant mediums in increasing the regional and global profile of a country. Healthy news talk shows, dramas and films can counter misunderstandings, ignorance, and baseless hatred that people in other countries bear towards us, he said. Pakistan's electronic media needs to act responsibly since most of the world learns about Pakistan through media channels, which most often portray us solely through the lens of either the Indo-Pak conflict or terrorism with little or no emphasis on our flourishing culture, developed society, and successful business arena, he lamented.

During the Q/A session, it was pointed out that both cultural diplomacy by the government and a media that showcases Pakistan's positives rather than harping on the negatives can succeed in reaching influential members of foreign societies who cannot be reached through traditional channels. Some of the audience members also shared how increased cultural interaction with youth in foreign countries allows a country to have a positive impact on individuals who may one day become highly influential leaders in their respective countries.

The conference speakers were unanimous in their view that the government's efforts in battling some of the biases towards Pakistan in some international circles were commendable. A combination of cultural and public diplomacy is not only a powerful tool that can improve public image, but can also help bring economic investment and tourism opportunities. Pakistan has been in negative limelight for a number of years owing to security challenges, but through recent improvements has been able to pursue effective diplomatic measures to curb xenophobia to a certain extent. However, there is need to do more to improve and strengthen its global profile by developing a brand of Pakistan which is currently unknown to the rest of the world, as it will help in developing the country's soft power. Former Ambassador Inam ul Haque, Chairman, Board of Governors, IPRI, concluded the session, followed by a Vote of Thanks by President IPRI, Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin.