

## **Pakistan and Russia need to improve their relations**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: Prof. Zhou Rong, Chief of South Asia Bureau of the Guang Ming Daily of China, while speaking at a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies here on Thursday, said that Pakistan is China’s best friend internationally and Russia is the second best friend. He maintained that China would welcome improvement of relationship between its two best friends. He argued that since India had become a world sought-after country and was gravitating towards the U.S., the Russians would also be interested in mending fences with the Pakistanis. Prof. Zhou was of the view that Pakistan’s fears of Russia were misplaced. He said that Russia’s reach has shrunk significantly after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and that it is now far away from Pakistan to threaten it militarily. He also did not think that Russia would be interested in doing that at any point in the near future. Therefore, he emphasized the need for Pakistan to improve its relations with Russia while putting aside its misplaced fears.

Prof. Zhou maintained that Pakistan is emotionally pro-China; but that it is psychologically pro-U.S. because of the long-standing institutional relationship it has enjoyed with the latter. He attributed the good relations between the two countries partly to the fact that many among Pakistani elite had studied or stayed in the U.S. and still preferred sending their children to the U.S. for studies. He said though that China is never bothered by Pakistan’s relationships with the U.S. and that it actually benefitted from them in developing its own relations with America. Summarizing U.S. policy interests with respect to Pakistan, Prof. Zhou said, “The U.S. wants to utilize, restrict, and reform Pakistan.” He elaborated that the U.S. wants to utilize Pakistan in the war against terrorism, restrict Pakistan’s growing religious radicalism, and reform Pakistan to make it a liberal secular democracy. He added that Pakistan could not become a secular democracy because of its strong Islamic roots, and that it could not become a theocracy ruled by Taliban either because of the modern undercurrents in its society. He cautioned against the Pak-U.S. relationship being based on incongruent and at times divergent interests.

Prof. Zhou said that Pak-China relationship is exceptional because it is instinctive. He compared it to the relationship between two brothers who have to come to each other’s help instinctively. He said that Pakistan and China needed to develop the energy and trade corridor through the sea routes that has been talked about for the past six years. He also wanted Pakistan and China to develop a train route across the Pak-China land border through Xinjiang and Gilgit-Baltistan. He added that Pakistan would have to proactively persuade Chinese government to initiate the rail-link between the two countries. He also emphasized the need for enhanced Chinese language training for Pakistanis for the improvement of the relations.