

## **All political parties want peace with India: Kasuri**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: Former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, who was the main speaker at a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Wednesday, said, “Not a single political party of Pakistan is against the peace process with India.” According to Mr. Kasuri, the domestic socio-economic compulsions of both India and Pakistan had made them keen on improving their relations with one another. “India cannot become a global power if it would not resolve its issues with Pakistan,” said Mr. Kasuri. He appreciated Pakistan’s decision, in principle, to grant most-favored nation (MFN) status to India, but added that India also needed to remove the plethora of non-tariff barriers that the Pakistani exporters were facing.

Mr. Kasuri said that, contrary to the general perception in the west, the Pakistani military also supports the peace process. He added though that the approach of the military toward India had relatively hardened over the past few years because of excessive Indian involvement in Afghanistan with the approach of the endgame there. Mr. Kasuri shared that when he was the foreign minister, the Indian companies were very eager about investing in Pakistan because of the economic growth in the country.

Mr. Kasuri was of the opinion that the aspirations of the Kashmiris needed to be considered as a priority for the resolution of Kashmir issue. According to Mr. Kasuri, the first two things that the Kashmiris want are the withdrawal of the Indian troops from the valley and a reversal of the efforts on the part of the Indian government to reduce it to a normal state under its constitution. Therefore, Mr. Kasuri argued for a step-by-step approach for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in view of the short and long-term aspirations of the Kashmiris. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at IRS, maintained that while Kashmiris and Indians were eager to see an improvement of relations with Pakistan, they were deterred by the political instability here. Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS, argued that over a period of time the Indian army had strengthened its political position and had acquired a virtual veto on Siachen dispute today.

Foreign policy analyst, Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan, warned that Indian eagerness toward the dialogue process with Pakistan could wane if the government in Pakistan was unstable. He also added that India was pretending to be bigger in size than it actually is, which was keeping it from engaging in a serious dialogue process with Pakistan. Amb. Kahlid Mahmood argued that publicly giving up on Pakistan’s stated position on Kashmir during the presidency of Gen. Pervez Musharraf had negatively impacted Pakistan’s negotiating strength. Amb. Asif Ezdi called Gen. Musharraf’s four-point formula on Kashmir a sell-off.

Mr. Kasuri also called for revisiting the Indus Water Treaty, not in terms of abrogating it altogether, but to review it in light of the changing ecological situation in the region. Other participants of the roundtable included: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President IRS; Amb. Aziz Ahmed Khan; Prof. Zhou Rong of Chinese Guang Ming Daily; Mr. Pierre Mayaudon, Deputy Head of the EU delegation in Islamabad; Mr. Dragos

Report: Roundtable on “Pak-India Peace Process: Its Current State and Prospects” with Mr. Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan on January 11, 2012

Luca, First Secretary at the Embassy of Romania, and Mr. Robert Ewing of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.