

Trade and people-to-people contacts urged between Bangladesh and Pakistan

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ISLAMABAD: Participants of a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Monday agreed that Bangladesh and Pakistan needed to enhance cooperation in future and get past the bitter historical legacies of the past.

Mr. Sayed Kamaluddin, Editor of the Weekly Holiday Dhaka, was of the view that dreaming about a confederation between Bangladesh and Pakistan was misplaced. He added that Bangladesh was a sovereign political reality that wanted to have good relations with all the regional countries including Pakistan. Mr. Kamaluddin regretted the low volume of trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan. He considered lack of direct shipping line between the two countries as one of the reasons for the low volume of trade and strongly urged both the governments to establish a direct shipping line. He firmly believed that there was market for Pakistani cotton-based products in Bangladesh.

Dr. Rezwana Hossain Siddiqui, Acting Editor of the Daily Dinkal Dhaka, called for greater people-to-people interactions between Bangladeshi and Pakistani people. He said that the people of Bangladesh still liked Pakistan and that it was also obvious from the support Pakistan cricket team would get in Bangladesh. Dr. Siddiqui was strongly of the opinion that people-to-people contacts could get rid of any negative sentiments between the people of the two countries. He suggested establishment of a cultural center in Dhaka by Pakistan. He acknowledged that there was a war museum in Bangladesh, which reflected somewhat negatively on Pakistan, but added that it did not mean that the two countries could not look towards better relations in the future. Mr. Kamaluddin added that if atrocities were committed by the Pakistani armed forces against Bengalis, the Bengalis also committed atrocities against the non-Bengali population of Bangladesh after independence. He added that there were several authors and commentators in Bangladesh who were calling for accountability of the Bengalis perpetrating violence on the non-Bengali population of Bangladesh.

Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS, proposed a joint rewriting of the history surrounding the circumstances of partition by Bangladeshi and Pakistani authors to overcome what he called, "obfuscations created by external forces." Ms. Farhat Parveen, Senior Research Analyst at IRS, criticized the use of the term "liberation" by Bangladesh to describe their independence. She was of the view that Bangladesh was not subjugated by Pakistan to be liberated. Mr. Basharat Hussain, Research Scholar at IRS, called for positive perception-building among the Bangladeshi children and youth through media and textbooks. Mr. Imran Sardar, Research Scholar at IRS, maintained that both Bangladeshi and Pakistani governments would have to evolve a futuristic outlook on their bilateral relationship.

Other participants of the roundtable were: Mr. Sadeq Khan, Editor South Asia Journal Parlin, NJ, U.S.; Mr. Masumur Rahman Khalili, News Editor and Special Correspondent Daily Naya Diganta Dhaka; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS; and Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst IRS.