

## **Solution to Siachen conflict is nowhere near, say experts**

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ISLAMABAD: “There are greater chances of finding survivors under the avalanche in Gyari than there are chances of softening in Indian stance on Siachen,” said Foreign Policy Analyst, Amb. Asif Ezdi here on Thursday. He was the main speaker at a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) on “Pak-India Peace Process and Siachen”. He was of the view that the general perception of Siachen conflict in Pakistan was that of madness, but that this perception was not shared across the border in India. He elaborated the military, economic, and environmental costs of the conflict, but showed his concern that India was willing to pay all those costs rather than resolve the conflict.

Foreign policy analyst and former diplomat, Amb. Aziz Ahmed Khan, went a step further and said, “We should not waste the time of the two Defense Secretaries, and do away with the Defense Secretary-level dialogue.” Amb. Khan was of the view that Indian stance has hardened over the years since the two countries had come closest to resolving the conflict in 1989 in the fifth round of Defense Secretary-level talks. In his opinion the Siachen conflict would not be resolved in the near future. Former Foreign Secretary, Amb. Riaz Khokhar shared that he had attended around seven of the twelve Defense Secretary-level dialogues and that the minutes of those meetings all read the same. He did not have any hopes of a settlement of the dispute in the upcoming round of negotiations. Mr. Arshad H. Abbasi, Advisor on Water and Energy issues at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) shared that India was already sending geologists to the disputed region for the prospects of establishing hot-thermal power plants and exploration of minerals.

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Saleem Haider expressed his heartfelt grief over the loss of human life in Gyari. He added, however, that the incident should not make Pakistani leadership eager for a settlement on the Indian terms. “We should not appear as quitters,” said Gen. Haider. Amb. Ezdi also expressed his discontent with the politically and emotionally charged discussion on the Siachen conflict after the Gyari disaster. He called for a balanced and objective understanding of the dispute and, thus, suggested solutions. He firmly disapproved of the suggestion of unilateral withdrawal of troops from the area.

Senior environmentalist, Dr. Qamar uz Zaman Chaudhry, highlighted the environmental costs of the conflict, especially the recession of the Siachen glacier because of the presence of the two militaries, and urged the two countries to find a solution for the dispute for the benefit of the people of both the countries. Foreign Policy Analyst, Amb. B.A. Malik, called for a greater understanding of the local, regional, and international context of Pakistan before weighing in Pakistan’s options in the scenario. He called environmental disasters wake-up calls for decision-makers on both the sides. “Zero-sum games hardly result in peace,” he said.

Elaborating on the legal aspect of the conflict, international law expert, Ahmer Bilal Soofi, said that Pakistan’s offer to attach an annexure to the military withdrawal agreement detailing demilitarization from occupied positions should have held value for the Indian side. He argued that Indian insistence on

demarcation of Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) “would have a pre-emptive implication in support of a solution favoring India,” which would not be acceptable to Pakistan.

Other participants of the roundtable included: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President IRS; Mr. Pierre Mayaudon, Deputy Head of Delegation, EU Delegation to Pakistan; Mr. Dragos Cosmin Luca, First Secretary Embassy or Romania; Mr. Gilles Bourbao, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of France; Mr. Rubina Afzal, Senior Political and Human Rights Officer at the British High Commission; Ms. Lisa A. Buzenas, Political/Economic Officer at the U.S. Embassy; Amb. Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director of Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS); Dr. Mavara Inayat, Professor at the Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU); and researchers from IRS.