

Pakistan and Azerbaijan: Friends and Brothers

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ISLAMABAD: “Pakistan and Azerbaijan are more than friends, they are brothers,” said Amb. Dashgin Shikarov, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan in Pakistan. He was speaking at a roundtable on “Pakistan-Azerbaijan Relations” organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Friday to commemorate the contribution of former president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, to the Pak-Azerbaijan relations on the occasion of his 90th birth anniversary.

Amb. Shikarov highlighted that the Pak-Azerbaijan friendship was founded by two great leaders of the two countries, Heydar Aliyev and Benazir Bhutto. He expressed his gratitude for Pakistan’s unequivocal support to Azerbaijan over its territorial dispute with neighboring Armenia. He added that Azerbaijan also extended its full support to Pakistan over Kashmir and that the Heydar Aliyev Foundation had also constructed a school in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) that was destroyed in the 2005 earthquake. He added that the President and Prime Minister of AJK were routinely invited to the events at the embassy of Azerbaijan in Islamabad.

Dr. Ilham Mammadov, First Secretary at the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Islamabad, shared that Heydar Aliyev was asked by the people of Azerbaijan to lead their country at a time in 1993 when it was in war and in great turmoil. He shared that Aliyev not only liberated most of the territories occupied by Armenia, but also put Azerbaijan on a path of development that has resulted in an unprecedented economic growth. He shared that Azerbaijan’s foreign exchange reserves stood at \$ 45 billion and that the country had invested hugely in other countries. He said that it was because of the international prestige that Azerbaijan is enjoying that it became a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from the competitive East European region.

Dr. Mammadov stated that Heydar Aliyev knew the spirit of Pakistan that is why he reached out to Pakistan and Turkey for friendship after assuming charge. He called relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan brotherly and strategic. He added that National Bank of Pakistan was the first foreign bank to be allowed to open a branch in Azerbaijan.

Commenting on the role of religion in the state and society of Azerbaijan, Dr. Mammadov said, “Azerbaijan is an ultra-modern secular country with strong Muslim values.” He added that militancy and extremism was imposed on the moderate society of Pakistan from outside, and stated that terrorism and extremism could be countered only by fighting ignorance. “Education instills the judgment of choice in people,” said Dr. Mammadov, adding that the literacy rate in Azerbaijan stood at 99.7 percent. He maintained that Pakistan would eventually come out strong after defeating religious extremism and terrorism.

Dr. Mammadov was of the view that the progress of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was hampered because of problems in bilateral relations between the member countries. He stressed the need for greater cultural relations and understanding between the member countries of ECO. He shared

Report: Roundtable on “Pakistan-Azerbaijan Relations with a special focus on the contributions of Heydar Aliyev” on May 3, 2013

that studies were already being conducted in Azerbaijan on Allama Iqbal and that similar studies could be conducted in Pakistan on Nizami, the Azerbaijani poet who wrote the epic poem of Leyli Majnun, besides authoring the masterpiece “Seven Beauties” in 1197.

President of IRS, Mr. Ashraf Azim, expressed his deep appreciation for the people of Azerbaijan and Amb. Shikarov, who has spent most of his career in Pakistan. He reiterated Pakistan’s support for Azerbaijan over its dispute with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh and expressed his gratitude for Azerbaijan’s support to Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir.

Other participants of the roundtable included: Mr. Chingiz Garibi, Second Secretary at the Embassy of Azerbaijan; Mr. Zaur Abbasov, Admin Officer at the Embassy of Azerbaijan; Mr. Muhammad Asif Noor, Editor of the Diplomatic Insight Magazine; Prof Aftab Qazi of the Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad; Ms. Saima Bilal from the National Defence University; Mr. Usman Arshad and Sardar Humayun from Sniffers Private Limited; Ms. Farhat Perveen, Research Fellow at IRS; Mr. Khalid Mehmood Malik, Senior Research Analyst at IRS; Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS; Mr. Basharat Hussain, Research Scholar at IRS; Mr. Imran Sardar, Research Scholar at IRS; Ms. Sidra Tariq, Research Scholar at IRS; Ms. Humera Iqbal, Research Scholar at IRS; Mr. Shahbaz Saeed, Research Scholar at IRS; and Mr. Nasir Zaidi Senior Collation Officer at IRS.