

## **Chinese scholars emphasize people-to-people contacts**

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Li Xiaohua, Vice President of China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), emphasized the importance of people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and China. He was speaking at a roundtable discussion on Pak-China Relations at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Tuesday. He said that China believed in peaceful development based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Mr. Li expressed concerns over the announcement of the shift of U.S. naval pivot towards the Pacific and its growing involvement in South China Sea.

President IRS, Mr. Ashraf Azim, highlighted the importance of the all-weather and time-tested friendship between Pakistan and China. He added that the situation in Afghanistan was presenting new challenges for the region, and cautioned China against the growing U.S. interest in South China Sea. Mr. Azim was of the view that India needed to be assimilated fully into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) “to wean it away from U.S. influence.” Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at IRS, maintained that U.S. was evidently shifting its focus towards South China Sea and the Pacific after end of major combat operations in Afghanistan by 2014. She added that the U.S. wanted India to play a “rebalancing role in Asia Pacific.” She was of the view that Taliban might be willing to negotiate because they seemed incapable of dislodging the government in Afghanistan. She called for strengthening of trilateral dialogue between Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan. She said that while there was progress between India and Pakistan in the fields of liberalization of trade, investment, and visa regimes, progress on security issues remained insignificant. Dr. Akhtar added that the Kashmiris were feeling left out of the dialogue process between India and Pakistan. Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS, was not very optimistic about the security situation in Afghanistan beyond 2014 because of the ongoing insurgency and the internal weaknesses of Afghan government.

Other participants of the roundtable discussion included: Mr. Chen Zuming, Vice President CAIFC; Mr. Deng Wenqing, Deputy Secretary General CAIFC; Mr. Chen Qiwu, Council Member CAIFC; Mr. Wu Shan, Deputy Director Second Department of Asian Affairs CAIFC; Mr. Cai Pengming, Deputy Section Chief of the Department of European Affairs at CAIFC; Mr. Jiang Kun, Deputy Section Chief of Department of American and Oceanic Affairs at CAIFC, and researchers of IRS.