

Report: Roundtable with a delegation from China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), on March 19, 2015.

## **Overall regional dynamic is positive**

**Aarish U. Khan**

On March 19, 2015, a delegation of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) visited Institute of Regional Studies. The delegation was headed by Dr. Ji Zhiye, President of CICIR. Other members of the delegation were: Dr. Hu Shisheng, Director of Institute for South and South East Asian and Oceania Studies at CICIR, Ms. Li Xin, Coordinator Academic Exchange Program in CICIR, and Mr. Li Wei, Researcher at CICIR.

Ms. Sidra Tariq, Research Officer at IRS, gave the visiting delegation a briefing on Sino-Indian relations after the coming into power of the Modi government in India. She highlighted the competitive elements of the relations between the two countries such as border disputes, differences over Tibet that were exacerbated by an invitation to the prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile, Lobsang Sangay, to attend Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's inauguration, as well as early visits of PM Modi to Bhutan, Nepal and, more importantly, Japan.

"Though India and China have made important advances in their bilateral relationship over the past year, Obama's recent visit to India raised concerns that India will align itself with the United States in Asia," said Ms. Tariq. Therefore, she argued, PM Modi's visit to China in May 2015 will be an important litmus test for the state of India-China relations.

Ms. Tariq underscored the importance of strong trade and investment relations between China and India. She added that there has been a recent move for improving people-to-people contacts as well with designation of 2015 as 'Visit India' year in China and 2016 as the 'Visit China' year in India.

Ms. Tariq stated that establishment of confidence building measures (CBMs) like: the 2005 "India-China Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," the Strategic Economic Dialogue, a Border Defense Cooperation Agreement in October 2013, and more recently, a Maritime Cooperation Dialogue could prove as stabilizers in the competitive aspect of relations between the two countries. She added that the two countries were also cooperating at the international level on forums such as: the Russia-China-India strategic dialogue, the G20, the BASIC group of countries, and BRICS. "The competitive dynamic in the relations is being balanced by the cooperative measures," said Ms. Tariq. She emphasized that while rivalries still persisted, economic interdependence and a pragmatic approach to foreign policy on both sides are likely to prevent open conflict.

Mr. Basharat Hussain, Research Officer at IRS, gave a briefing to the visiting delegation on Pak-India relations after the assumption of power of the Modi government in India. Mr. Hussain highlighted the recent improvement in Pak-India relations with the resumption of the secretaries' level talk in Islamabad recently. He said that the current BJP leadership policy toward Pakistan is driven by three major dynamics: domestic political compulsions, regional dynamics, and international Pressure.

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Mr. Hussain attributed the softening of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stance toward Pakistan at the internal level to the loss in Delhi elections, and formation of a coalition government with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Mufti Muhamamd Saeed in Indian-Held Kashmir (IHK). At the international level, Mr. Hussain attributed the change to the visit of the U.S. president where he stressed to resume dialogue with Pakistan. At the regional level, Mr. Hussain underscored the importance of improving Pak-Afghan relations after Ashraf Ghani coming into power in Kabul for compelling India for a rapprochement. Mr. Hussain saw a silver lining for Pakistan in the strong decision-making position of Narendra Modi in comparison with the previous Congress-led UPA government.

Dr. Hu was of the view that BJP under Modi is in a strong decision-making and policy-making position with a focus on socio-economic development. He added that India wanted to dominate smaller neighbors because it wanted to become a global power for which it needed to be in a dominant position in the region. He expressed his concern that any major terrorist attack on the pattern of Mumbai with links leading to Pakistan could seriously destabilize the region.

Replying to questions about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS, said that the opposition to the route of the corridor could be muted by making alterations to the railway line plans under the CPEC. He argued that since the railway line from Karachi to Peshawar (ML-1) was still in feasibility stage, the route could be changed from Karachi-Peshawar to Gwadar-Peshawar instead by linking Gwadar with Peshawar through Khuzdar, Quetta, Zhob, and D.I. Khan Route. He maintained that a feasibility of the railway line from Gwadar to Peshawar through this western route needed to be started at the earliest possible while cautioning about the tough geography and poor law and order situation in that region.