



# Institute of Regional Studies

## IRS Panel Discussion on PM Khan's visit to Colombo

Islamabad: Experts were of the view that PM Khan's visit to Sri Lanka is timely as it provided much needed boost to Pakistan-Sri Lankan relations. Also important in that the region is passing through rapid geostrategic transitions where Pakistan's outreach was highly required. While speaking at the panel discussion on 'PM Khan's visit to Colombo' organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), the panelists, however, stressed the need for institutionalization of bilateral relations between the two countries.



Lt. Gen. (retd) Amjad Shoaib while highlighting the Sri Lanka's foreign policy constraints expressed that Colombo has limited foreign policy choices primarily because of Indian influence. Prior to any foreign engagement, Colombo has to provide assurance to the Indians that New Delhi's interests would not be hurt. Pakistan, on the other hand enjoys close relationship with Sri Lanka. Islamabad is an important part of BRI and the CPEC. PM Khan has advised Sri Lanka to get benefit from the CPEC which can provide Colombo an excess to Central Asian states. But international pressure is constantly pulling the country away from this venture, he added. Lt. Gen. Amjad Shoaib was of the view that Pakistan can really help Sri Lanka in neutralizing major power's influence in the country as nobody has ever looked into the Island's own problems. He further said the recent PM Khan's visit was a clear message to India that Pakistan is not 'isolated'. AVM (retd) Shahzad Chaudhry said it is high time that both countries need to streamline their relationship as the current regime in Sri Lanka is experienced in balancing their relationship. Mr. Chaudhry appreciated Sri Lanka's support at a time when nobody was ready to come to Pakistan as the country was declared unsafe. He was of the view that we need to invest more in cementing our ties. Apart from economic collaborations, the cultural, religious, education and sports are those areas that can bring both the countries more closer to each other. He stressed that Pakistan must learn and benefit from Sri Lanka's skill development sector the country has certified, and trained people in every field.

Mr. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, a renowned journalist and author from Sri Lanka also spoke on this occasion. He was of the view that the recent visit is significant as both countries are under radar now because of their important strategic locations in the region. Pakistan and Sri Lanka, more or less, are facing the same geopolitical challenges, he added. While commenting on PM Khan's proposal of connecting CPEC with Hambantota Port Mr. Asanga said that it is really an important suggestion which is workable but we need to build a regional security architecture first to keep the geo-political and geostrategic tensions at bay for better integration. Nevertheless, there are many areas where we can collaborate unconditionally and these have also been discussed during Khan's visit.

Mr. Qamar Cheema, Lecturer at NUML was of the view that we need to invest in non-traditional areas, particularly in religious tourism that will not only bring the people of two countries more closer but also help improve both countries' image abroad. He urged that Pakistan should reach out to the neighboring countries more proactively. The panel discussion was chaired by Prof. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar of National Defence University.