



Institute of Regional Studies

Right, if not ripe, moment to go with normalization between India and Pakistan

Islamabad: There are mixed vibes on the both sides of the border that have the underlying message of hope. The revival of the SAARC in the present circumstances is crucial to bringing the arch rivals closer to each other. Several opportunities in the non-traditional spectrum are also awaiting political will from both sides. If not ripe, this is the right time to invest in the betterment of relations between India and Pakistan. These were the views expressed by the panelist in a webinar on the prospects of India-Pakistan relations organized by the Institute of Regional Studies.



While speaking to the participants, Dr. Salma Malik, Asst. Professor at Quaid-i-Azam University said that Pakistan has always come up with workable, and concrete solutions to the problems that India and Pakistan have been facing. In the case of Kashmir, Pakistan has offered a clear roadmap to resolve the conflict amicably. Unfortunately, the high politics overshadowed the progress achieved in that regard, she added. On the role of SAARC, she was of the view that one cannot delist the organization in framing the overall relations between the two countries. SAARC did play a role in the past, and it has the potential to bring harmony between India and Pakistan in the future as well, she stressed. On Indian cartographic maneuvering, she said it is ‘completely meaningless’ since the facts do not support the Indian claims. She also argued that Indian thought that ‘Pakistan is nowhere in India’s strategic calculation’, is baseless. The Cold Start doctrine, the Surgical Strikes, are a few examples to undermine India’s claim, she added.

Dr. Suba Chandran, Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, India, was a bit optimistic on the prospects of improving relations between the two countries. The ‘good gestures’ cannot bring a major shift, the genuine impulse and the sustained efforts are required to grab the opportunities if there are any, he stressed. He built his arguments on the three striking factors wherein both India and Pakistan differ. On the international level, he argued that the focus is entirely different since the Indian approach is pro-east, and Pakistan’s tilt is towards the western side. On the regional level, India is vigorously investing in its ‘neighborhood first’ policy and there is no mention of Pakistan in it. On the state level, both countries are building new narratives for the 2020s, and there is no place for the bilateral relationship, he lamented. The push and pull factors on regional and international level have overshadowed the possibility of normalization between India and Pakistan, he further said. He argued that there is no such thing as low-hanging fruits and cooperation in non-traditional areas. He said that both sides have to do more in the larger security domain and be clear what has to be achieved. Otherwise, they will be muddling through as they have been doing for the last many years, he added.

In contrast, Qamar Cheema, a lecturer from the National University of Modern Languages, said that several opportunities lie in cooperating in the non-traditional security domain. The only need is to delink the high politics from the low politics, he emphasized. He cautioned that there are no alternatives to peace. He said that both countries must not be hostage to the past as both has suffered in terms of both men and resources particularly in the Kashmir conflict. For betterment of relations there is a need to open up in showbiz and sports. On the role of the United States, he said ‘it is crucial in creating an amiable environment wherein both countries can move forward’.

While concluding, President IRS Ambassador Nadeem Riyaz was of the view that role of any third party in any settlement of issues between Pakistan and India will only be relevant when both have the political will and desire to go ahead. He stressed the need to operationalize SAARC and hope for continued peace. He stated that economic prosperity, combating social issues like illiteracy and poverty was essential for lasting peace in the region. He thanked all the participants and the speakers for a lively discussion.