Violations of Rights of Religious Minorities (Muslims & Sikhs) in India

One-Day Roundtable on "Violations of Rights of Religious Minorities (Muslims and Sikhs) in India" was organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) on July 12, 2017 at IPRI Conference Hall, Islamabad. The roundtable focused on the following main themes:

- Indian Secularism and Policy towards Religious Minorities: Myth and Reality
- Plight of Muslim Community and Atrocities by Indian Security Forces on Kashmiris
- Indian Human Rights Violations and Atrocities committed by the Indian Government on the Sikhs, Accelerating their Demand for a Separate Homeland

Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President and Executive Director, Strategic Vision Institute (SVI), Islamabad chaired the roundtable. Participants of the roundtable included professional experts, practitioners, scholars and academicians. During the roundtable, the suffering of minorities living in India, in particular the Muslims and Sikhs were discussed. It was pointed out that the minorities living in India are a victim of Hindu extremism and the world needs to respond to the sufferings of the religious minorities such as Muslims, Sikhs and Christians.

Brig (R) Sohail Tirmizi, Acting President Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in his welcome address said that the minorities in India face all types of inequality in all spheres of life. Even the use of force and human rights violations of the religious minorities in India have become a common phenomenon. In the environment of threats and coercion, the space for the religious minorities in India is shrinking, which directly opposes the Indian claims of secularism and its constitution that guarantees equal rights to all its citizens without any discrimination. The intolerance against the religious minorities especially the Muslims and Sikhs, and extremism in India suggest grim outcomes where public speech, eating habits, and alternative ideas, are all subservient to a restrictive interpretation of a single majority religion, i.e. Hinduism.

The human rights abuses by the Indian security forces in the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir State are well-known. The abuses range from mass killings, enforced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual abuse to political repression and suppression of freedom of speech.

He also remarked that the judicial system, ethos and sentiment of hate in India are factors that are affecting an attempt towards seeking justice. The political stability in India will remain a challenge as minorities in the country will continue to feel alienated and targeted by their own government.

The roundtable deliberations and the input of the speakers and discussants brought forth the following salient points:

- While discussing the myths and realities behind Indian secularism and policies towards religious minorities specifically Muslims, it was highlighted that the secular character of the Indian constitution was designed primarily for political purposes. The
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incidents of abuse and mistreatment of religious minorities in India are in sharp contrast to the secular principles. Since the time Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has come in power, Muslims have been targeted under various hate campaigns such as Ghar Wapsi, Love Jihad, and most recently in the name of cow vigilantes and ban on beef slaughtering. According to a 2017 Report of India Spend, 86 per cent of the targeted victims were Muslims in 63 heinous hate incidents that have occurred during the period 2010-2017. However, 98 per cent of these incidents have taken place after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power.

• To counter the Hindu domination and protection of their rights, the Muslims need to empower themselves politically as well as socio-economically. Besides, the Muslims also need to project their stance unanimously both at the domestic as well as the international levels. At the domestic front, networking and alliances with the ‘saner’ elements in Indian society may be undertaken. Internationally, there has been efforts by the human rights organizations but to put pressure on India to be fair to its minorities; the Muslims need to strategize their efforts, so that their voices may reach the appropriate audience.

• While discussing the plight of Muslim community and Indian atrocities on the Kashmiris, it was underscored that the third world post-colonial states, like India had an in-built hegemonic process due to which its society has been divided into various strata. In such divided societies, some segments are gainers while the others are losers. The minorities according to their size and weaknesses are the actual losers and they somehow have to live a subservient life to the dominating elite. The communal and caste system in the Indian society has further exacerbated the hegemonic divide. In India, this class difference has been translated into the constitution, as it neither recognizes Indian minorities nor their rights to co-existed as equal citizens.

• Politically, India’s reliance on aggression against minorities ensures a large vote bank for the BJP since the presence of religious minorities is perceived to be a hurdle in the process of national integration. Under the garb of nationhood and socio-cultural integration, the rights of Muslim community are being exploited. In the process of cultural transformation, religious minorities especially the Muslims have been a victim of ‘soft Hindutva’. With regards to the state of education for the Muslims, it was said that the educational system in India is designed in such a manner that the Muslim community cannot compete with the Hindus in the scientific and technical fields.

• While discussing the increased Indian atrocities against Sikh community and their consequent demand for separate homeland, it was opined that the Sikhs were a religiously and socially distinct community and their demand for a separate province in India was primarily to safeguard their religious and cultural practices. The Sikhs have always feared that like other religions of “Buddhism” and “Jainism”, they might also lose their identity to the Hindu oppression. The use of oppressive strategies by the Indian Government have left the Sikh community in complete distraught. Not only, their movement was termed ‘secessionism’ but in an effort to subvert their struggle, the sanctity of the Golden Temple was also violated. Various pressure tactics were employed to curb the Sikh’s demand for a separate province. The ‘Khalistan movement’, which called for a separate homeland for Sikh’s, was brutally suppressed by the Congress Government. Anti-Sikh riots, supported by police and Congress leaders, were the worst atrocities on Sikhs in which around 10,000 Sikhs were killed. Despite numerous sufferings, the Sikhs have not given up their struggle for their separate identity. The Sikhs in India also have support of their community members, living in other countries.

• Concerning the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), the ill-treatment incurred upon the people of the valley is, in actual, an extension of India’s barbaric rule. Pakistan supports the Kashmir cause on moral and political grounds. Moreover, given the socio-cultural background, there exist deep historic
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and religious commonalities between people of Pakistan and Kashmir, which makes the connection between them stronger. However, seeing the severity of the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), serious deliberations on promotion of Kashmir issue on various international platforms are required. The situation in Kashmir must not be examined in isolation but the regional dimension must also be considered. The current situation cannot be allowed to continue. The sufferings of the innocent people of the valley must stop. There is a need to contribute wisely to the Kashmir cause, and undertake appropriate steps in projection of the issue to the outside world.

Major Recommendations

- The incidents of brutal violence against religious minorities have alarmingly increased under the current BJP’s government. The incidents of state-sponsored exploitation of minorities continue to grow in India. There is a need to awaken the consciousness of the international community against violations of rights of religious minorities i.e. Muslims and Sikhs in India and compel the international community to constrain India from such brutal behavior.
- Communal hatred and violence is directed against Muslims and Sikhs by the Hindu extremists in India. Moreover, abuses and sufferings of Kashmiris at the hands of the Indian Security Forces has become an open crime sheet. The violence against Sikhs in the Golden Temple attack is still fresh in the minds of Sikh minority. Therefore, the Indian Government and its security forces must be held accountable for perpetuating violence and denying justice to the minorities.
- In the light of legal aspects, an institutional and systematic approach must be adopted to address the issue of rights of religious minorities i.e. Sikhs and Muslims in India. Secularism in India has come to be questioned. The issue needs to be highlighted in academic circles at international level.
- The Indian Muslims face lack of representation in political and administrative avenues, there is a need to devise comprehensive and innovative socio-academic strategies, so that they may be empowered to play an efficient and productive role in the society. Their networking and alliances with the saner elements of the Indian society should also be an essential part of their strategy.
- There is a need to have cooperation and unity among the Muslim World in order to ensure protection of the rights of the Muslims in India. The conflictual and divided outlook of the Muslim World has made the status of Muslims practically insignificant in the global affairs. As a matter of fact, the unabated discriminatory behavior with Muslim minorities in India and in other countries is one of the major outcomes of this situation. The Muslim countries may collectively play a role to improve the situation and raise the issue with India so that it adopts policies of equity and justice for its minorities.
- In the international arena, there have been voices in UN Human Rights Council as well as reports by HR organizations which clearly mark the Indian atrocities against religious minorities. However, the need is to make these voices stronger.
- Pakistan may focus on the implementation of UN resolutions on Kashmir. There is a need to highlight the issue of Kashmir in Western capitals. More so, diplomatic community and missions must highlight the issues at other forums.
- India has been trying to falsely link the Kashmir freedom struggle to terrorism. Pakistan has to deal with this issue by institutionalizing the Kashmir Conflict. International human rights institutions need to be approached on regular basis so that true nature of Kashmiris freedom struggle can be highlighted.

Upcoming Event

Two-Day National Conference
Changing Security Situation in South Asia and Development of CPEC
Date: September 19-20, 2017
Venue: Islamabad Hotel

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23rd Lanzhou Trade

Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahman, Non-Resident Consultant and Mr. Khurram Abbas, Assistant Research Officer visited China from July 4 to July 13, 2017 to attend 23rd Lanzhou Trade and Investment Fair. During their visit, IPRI scholars participated in a substantive in-house discussion at the office of Gansu Association for International Friendly Cooperation (GAIIFC), besides attending the Trade and Investment Fair and China Silk Road Economic Belt Pragmatic Cooperation Forum held under Lanzhou Trade Fair. The delegation also visited historical places in Xian in Shaanxi Province, which is the starting point of ancient Silk Road.

In-house Discussion at Gansu Association for International Friendly Cooperation (GAIIFC)

The delegation participated in an in-house extensive discussion session at the conference room of Gansu Association for International Friendly Cooperation (GAIIFC). The in-house discussion largely focused on the progress and development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and security situation in Pakistan.

Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahman, presented his views on the development and progress of CPEC, while Mr. Khurram Abbas made a presentation on Pakistan’s security situation and counter-terrorism efforts.

While discussing the progress and development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahman stated that CPEC is a long-term development programme envisioning to expand economic relations and to connect Gwadar Port to China’s northwestern region of Xinjiang via highways, railways and pipelines to transport oil, gas and other goods. CPEC is considered critical for the future development of China-Pakistan relations under the fast changing geo-politics of the region. The importance of the project could be gauged from the fact that it is included in China’s 13th five-year economic and social development plan (2016-2020). The CPEC is a flagship project of Chinese President Xi’s grand strategic concept of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC at present is a 25 years plan (which may be extended in future) and will be completed in four phases, i.e., 2018 (Early Harvest), 2020 (Short Term), 2025 (Medium Term) and 2030 (Long Term). The work for early harvest is going smoothly and it is hoped that the deadline for completion of early harvest projects, i.e. 2018 will be met.

It was elaborated that the corridor project has four pillars, i.e., Gwadar Port, Energy Projects, Transport and Communication Infrastructure and Industrial parks. Nine CPEC Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are being set up in the country, as agreed in the 6th JCC in Beijing on 29 December 2016. Of these, two industrial zones are being set up by the federal government in Islamabad and Karachi. The rest of seven to be established, one each in Punjab, Sindh, KP, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, FATA and Azad Kashmir. Dr. Rahman said that CPEC is a huge development project and a grand initiative of cooperation for Pakistan, China and the region. He opined that CPEC faces many challenges, internal and external, but the key ones are the maintenance of security and political stability, ensuring transparency and good governance. He concluded by saying that the Chinese side should trust Pakistan's intent and ability to realize CPEC and develop more comprehensive understanding of the situation in Pakistan and the region in order to be more sensitive towards certain difficulties and issues coming in the way of construction of CPEC. After the launch of CPEC, neither China nor Pakistan could afford failure of this project as it will have immense negative consequences.

On Pakistan's efforts to counter terrorism, Mr. Khurram Abbas stated that terrorism and extremism are a constant threat to the stability of South Asia and the adjacent regions. Pakistan's national resolve against terrorism is appreciated globally for its sacrifices and continuous efforts against this menace. Pakistan has employed a two pronged strategy to fight terrorism i.e. by launching military operations (such as Operation Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat and Zarb-e-Azb) to clear the terrorists pockets alongside the simultaneous use of soft approach to engage local community through social sector development. As a result of Pakistan's offensive strategy, a decrease in terrorist attacks is visible since June 2014. However, as part of the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction, it is important to mainstream the people of affected areas through extensive socio-economic initiatives.

As terrorism is a global threat, Pakistan believes that extremism and terrorism should not be linked to any religion, nationality or civilization and its elimination requires a collective plan of action, globally. Unresolved conflicts including the Kashmir and Palestinian conflict, racial prejudice and discrimination, political marginalization, and exclusion from socio-economic development are the primary factors behind the spread of this menace.

Lanzhou Trade and Investment Fair

The 23rd China Lanzhou Investment and Trade Fair was co-sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce of China, All-China Federation of Returned
and Investment Fair

Overseas, China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and Gansu Provincial People’s Government. This forum had a basic objective of promoting openness, exploration, cooperation and development of Western China. This year Malaysia and Nepal were the co-hosts of this Fair along with Gansu Provincial Government. The theme of this year’s Forum was ‘Exploitation of Cooperation’. The Forum is a platform for scholars, entrepreneurs and government officials to conduct exchanges and communication freely focusing on the major issues of Belt and Road construction. Food Processing, ICT, Mining, Services Sector, Chinese Herbal Medicine and Tourism were the major areas of discussion for cooperation.

China Silk Road Economic Belt Pragmatic Cooperation Forum: Major Highlights

During the forum, it was elaborated that one of the major pillars of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the capacity building of partner countries in agriculture sector. In this regard, transfer of technology to all member countries in agriculture sector will be ensured. Energy security is another key objective of the BRI, for which the needs across region can be met through bilateral, multilateral and inter-regional agreements.

Concerning the role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), it was mentioned that SCO is trying to enhance the cooperation and develop legal framework for labour and immigration sectors among the member countries of BRI. Such an effort would help people to work in other member countries thereby, easing procedural requirements.

It was said that a Digital Silk Road is also the need of the hour. The e-commerce will be the major part of export and import among the member countries of BRI. Therefore, cooperation among the BRI member countries in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will be enhanced. Initially, contacts among universities and academicians will be developed to enhance ICT experts.

BRI should not only be seen as an economic project to uplift the region rather, it will provide a comprehensive framework of development for the world. This initiative will also provide various forums for political leaders of member countries to interact on regular basis and discuss the potential of economic cooperation and commercial ties among the regional countries. It is estimated that successful execution of BRI will help in increasing exports of Central Asian Republics (CARS) up to 23 per cent of their current GDP. In similar regard, Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-Iran-China have signed an agreement for the promotion of Cargo transportation up to Europe. Cargo Transportation from Tehran to EU will reduce the time and cost of transportation as compared to sea transportation.

The world must focus on resolution of crisis situation in Afghanistan. The BRI can be helpful in this regard. The agricultural industry of Afghanistan is likely to improve after completion of BRI. Trade and Investment among Special Economic Zones (SEZs) will help expansion of trade and improvement in communication between Afghanistan and the regional countries. However, peace in Afghanistan is a pre-requisite for all these developments to occur.

As Belt and Road Initiative aims to engage countries globally, besides the construction and expansion of infrastructure, numerous new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) will be signed among nations. Such agreements will facilitate reducing trade barriers, ensuring implementation of World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in true spirit. Lanzhou Trade and Investment Fair have developed itself into a very important platform for dialogue on cooperation among China and Belt and Road Initiative countries. This time, almost 30 countries participated as members.
Emerging Security Dynamics of South Asia

Dr. Ejaz Akram, Advisor to the President and Commandant, National Defence University, Islamabad, visited IPRI to deliver a lecture on “Emerging Security Dynamics of South Asia” on July 06, 2017.

While discussing the evolving security dynamics of South Asia, Dr. Ejaz Akram said that currently there exist two types of regional alignments. One includes the United States with India along its side to play a multi-faceted role in the region such as to engage rising Asian giant China. As world focus has shifted eastwards in last few years, it is important to note that the US already has an extended and established presence in the form of its naval bases at the rim of South China Sea and the North China Sea.

The other group includes China, Pakistan and Russia. These countries together desire to achieve peace in the region which could be the foundation for any kind of positive development. Dr. Akram considered China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as one such example. China wants to create an alternative trade route to the current one which involves crossing of the Strait of Malacca, an area which could potentially choke China’s trade in times of trouble. Given the underlined ambitions of common good, China views that every country needs to create its own political modernity rather than being dictated by external powers.

On volatile situation of Afghanistan, Dr. Akram considered free and fair election as an ultimate solution.

He opined that the former and the present governments lacked ownership of the land and the people, which ultimately led to the present civil war and further provided an impetus to the aggressive elements to continue war. Pakistan wants a friendly government in Afghanistan as both countries extensively share common values and natural linkage among its people.

Given Pakistan’s relations with countries in Middle East, Dr. Akram opined that various Western values and norms have made inroads in the region. But he considered ISIS, to be a potential threat for the entire world. He opined that Pakistan must maintain cordial ties with Central Asian Republics (CARs), however those states will remain under the Chinese and Russian influence in the foreseeable future.

Dr. Akram further recommended that as the western influence recedes, Pakistan must look for other options around keeping in view its national integrity and sovereignty. Pakistan, in collaboration with China and Russia needs to assist in the resolution of the Afghan crisis and support an outcome which is representative of the aspirations of the entire Afghan population. Pakistan must also utilize its entire state apparatus and will power to make CPEC a success. To gain maximum from CPEC, Pakistani leaders and people should engage in deep socialization with the Chinese culture and language as well.

Strengthening Peace and Cooperation in South Asia: Incentives and Constraints

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South-South Cooperation (SSC): Issues & Emerging Challenges

Ms. Maryam Nazir, Assistant Research Officer, delivered a presentation on the topic of, “South-South Cooperation (SSC): Issues & Emerging Challenges.”

Following are the salient points of the discussion:

The Concept of South-South Cooperation and its Evolution

- Historically, the term of South-South Cooperation (SSC) emerged to describe the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge among the developing countries, also known as countries of the Global South, soon after the end of World War II. Hypothetically, SSC is considered to be a broad framework for collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains. However, it is upon the countries of South how they translate these collaborations into bilateral or multilateral cooperation (often referred as Triangular Development Cooperations in this particular context). This cooperation encapsulates the regions of South America, Africa and Asia.

- As a result, it is believed that cooperation through these objectives would strengthen the voice and bargaining power of developing countries in multilateral negotiations; enhance the multiplier effect of technical cooperation; increase the knowledge of and confidence in the capacities available in developing countries alongside better coordination of policies on issues of development. The Bandung Conference is regarded to be the milestone in the formation of SSC as a global political movement. With the emergence of Third World Solidarity Movement, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Group of 77 further supported the cause of self-reliance and called for the establishment of New International Economic Order (NIEO) respectively. Today, SSC stands as an established and recognized concept, under practice.

Triangular Development Cooperation (TDC) & SSC

- A relatively new trend reinforcing SSC is of triangular development cooperation (TDC) in which the Northern countries and multilateral agencies support the programmes of cooperation among the developing countries. TDC has the potential to strengthen the SSC and enhance its effectiveness in the coming years. The prime examples of TDCs are India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) triangle and India-Japan-Africa partnership.

The Debate

- Concerning the rise of various powers in Global South such as China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Brazil and growing apprehensions regarding the normative power politics and accumulation of wealth, there is a debate going on. The debate is polarized, between those who hold a hope in the potential of Southern economic development and the project of liberation from Northern domination and those radical critics who see this very success of the South as being far too profoundly subsumed within the existing global capitalist development paradigm.

SSC: Issues and Challenges

- As the concept of SSC is still in the stage of evolution, the nations and states face various issues and challenges when it comes to the consolidated implementation of developmental policies. These include issues of political solidarity, rise of unequal power relationships between the countries in the South, lack of inclusive participation in the formation of SSC partnerships, lack of flexibility and reform adjustment at the institutional level, inadequate development for cross-country programmes and projects alongside the emergence of new peace and security threats such as climate change and terrorism.

SSC & South Asian Perspective

- The entire South Asia is considered to be the part of Global South. Apart from geography and shared history, there is little that encourages, or compels, the South Asia region to cohere. The ambitions of economic interaction and interdependence have largely remained unaddressed due to polarization among regional states, in particular reference with SSC. In the persistence of longstanding conflicts, ethnic diversity, political disengagement, low indices of development and trade volumes, the region has less to offer to the concept of SSC. In the region of South Asia, there are no TDCs. However, South Asian states are establishing their partnerships with countries outside the region.

Recommendations

- Given the advancements in the subject, there is a need to revisit the entire concept of SSC. If compared the economic situation of 1950s with today’s modern world, states have risen to a different level of cooperation and development which somehow has changed the regional dynamics. Meanwhile, the practices have also started differing from the key core concept of political solidarity and harmony. For that, it requires re-formulation of strategies (based on inclusive process) which could bring together developed and developing states as a unified bloc.

- More so, the SSC stakeholders and recipient countries also need to address the issues of new power imbalances which are potentially undermining the founding principles of SSC.

- SSC actors must also adhere to SSC’s traditional focus on poverty alleviation by ensuring positive local economic impacts and averting negative effects within the framework of internationally agreed development goals.

- Recipient countries must have inclusive dialogues on how SSC partnerships are formed, defined, managed and evaluated in order to benefit their populations.

- To end the dependence from financial system of North, states must formulate strategies to harness greater trade and investment patterns in the Global South. It is only through economic development (through states’ own capacity and resources) that countries of Global South can influence the institutions and norms of Global North.

Conclusion

The concept of SSC is one indigenous effort in itself to pave ways for development in the least developed regions of the world. For the success of this concept, the states in Global South have to study the indigenous growth patterns in detail however, the cooperation between North and South must continue for the greater good of the whole world.
Call for Papers
IPRI Journal Winter 2018

The IPRI Journal is a biannual peer reviewed publication of the Institute. It is an HEC recognised ‘X’ category Journal, which is Pakistan’s second highest category for Social Sciences Journals. The Journal disseminates research, policies and ideas, primarily from Pakistan and the Global South and North, from the fields related to Social Sciences and International Affairs.

Interested researchers are invited to submit scholarly manuscripts and current book reviews for consideration for the IPRI Journal, Winter 2018 Issue. Submissions should not be previously published nor currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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