

Opening new chapter with Russia urged

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Islamabad

Ambassador (r) Tariq Fatemi has hoped President Zardari will be able to open a new chapter with Russia in his forthcoming visit to Moscow.

Fatemi was addressing one day seminar on 'Pakistan's relations with SCO in the light of forthcoming presidential visit to the region,' jointly organised by Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, and Centre for Research & Security Studies, here on Wednesday.

Fatemi said that Bhutto after taking over in one of first decisions expressed his desire to visit Moscow within eight weeks to demonstrate to Kremlin that he is willing to move ahead and he succeeded. Bhutto got steel mill and prisoners of war from India during his Soviet visit, Fatemi said.

He said that we must demonstrate to Russians that we have no interest in developments in Afghanistan and will not create problems and disturbances against India or Central Asia. He said that we always put our eggs in one basket and were unfortunate for having leaders for long times who lacked legitimacy in the people of Pakistan and dependent upon foreign countries.

He said Russia is going to be a bigger country and Pakistan in no case should ignore Moscow and stop acting as a satrap of Washington.

Ambassador (r) Riaz Muhammad Khan said that Pakistan should only play its role in Afghanistan if there is an initiative from Kabul. He questioned attributes of Pakistan-friendly government in Pakistan we are so longing. He said that we made mistake in 1992 after Najuballahs fall.

He said that Peshawar Accord was drafted by militant organisations. He said that Northern Alliance was a reality and we should not have said that Taliban should first establish on entire Afghanistan knowing that Pakhtoons were not the only nationality there.

Dr Khalid Rahman, Director-General of JI think-tank Institute of Policy Studies, said that initial aims of US to capture Osama, defeat Al-Quaida and defeat Taliban were extended to economic development and political improvement. He said that Taliban in Afghanistan have become a national resistance movement. He said complete withdrawal of foreign troops can only ensure a stable and sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

PML-Q MNA Marvi Memon started with asserting that foreign policy is not made in the Foreign Ministry or the Parliament but elsewhere. She said that we should take charge of terrorism issue and act as a responsible country in the region. She said that Pakistani people should put pressure on forces that matter in decision-making to come out of a state of denial and make the paradigm shift.

Dr Muhammad Islam from Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America said that Shinghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is successor of Shinghai Five created in 1996 as a platform for resolving border disputes between China, Russia and three CA Republics bordering China. Being a facilitating framework, he said, SCO can help us in improving relations with its members.

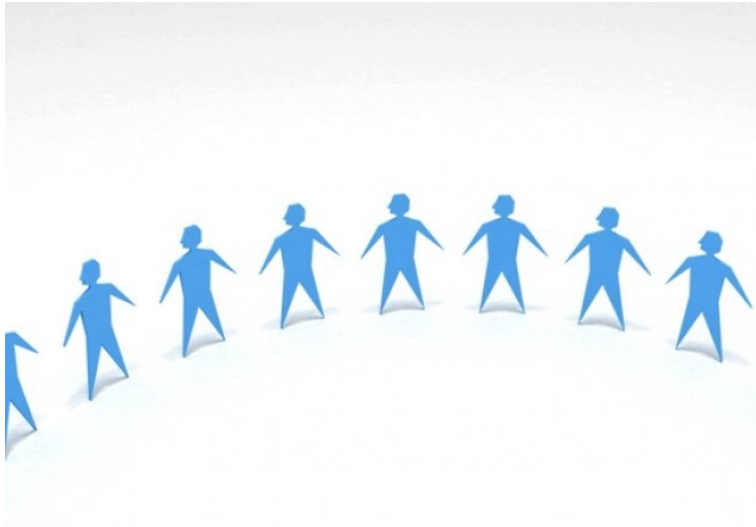
Dr Maqsud-ul-Hasan Nuri, Acting President of Islamabad Policy Research Institute, said that ours is a small country but we think as if we are a global power. He said that first we should put our house in order and things should be clear otherwise we cannot make big choices. He said SCO is not in a mood of expanding fast.

Earlier, Imtiaz Gul in his welcome remarks said that even Russian is interested in contributing to a regional solution of Afghanistan imbroglio.

Dr Rifaat Hussain said that many Pakistanis believe that Pakistan's traditional relations with US had not been very productive and giving us a niche in the world affairs and Central Asia is one of the reasons with which Islamabad should forge cordial relations with CA. Ambassador (r) Arif Ayub, Fazal-ur-Rehman from Institute of Strategic Studies and Salma Malik also spoke on the occasion.

Think tanks: Pakistan needs to be a ‘responsible player’ in the region

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Seminar focuses on Pakistan’s potential with Russia after the Americans leave.

Pakistan will have to come clear to its neighbours including Afghanistan, Russia, Iran and India and delink itself from historical strategic doctrines to take advantage of its regional potential for economic development.

This assertion was made by speakers at a seminar titled ‘Pakistan’s relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the light of forthcoming presidential visit to the region’ held here on Wednesday.

The event, which was jointly organised by the Defense and Strategic Studies Department of the Quaid-i-Azam University and the Centre for Research and Security Studies, provided insightful information to civil society and students over Pakistan’s relations with regional states.

Stressing for balanced relationship with the countries in the SCO, the speakers including politicians, academicians, diplomats, and researchers underlined that Pakistan needs to make adjustments in its foreign policy in the context of today’s changed world, wherein economy and trade have become the muscle of bilateral relationship.

“Pakistan must be a responsible player in the region by giving up cohabitating with terrorism”, said Marvi Memon, MNA from Pakistan Muslim League-Quad-e Azam [PML-Q], adding that ‘no development could take place until the issue of terrorism is handled relentlessly’.

She was of the view that the regional resource sharing can benefit every state if misfortunes like terrorism, separatism, poverty, narcotics and border dispute are overcome.

Referring to the forthcoming visit of President Asif Zardari to Russia, Tariq Fatimi, former ambassador to the US, said that the president should talk to the Russians sincerely, demonstrating that Russia is a power in the region.

He said Russia needs to be assured that “we will not create trouble in Central Asia, not keep Afghanistan on the boil and also have no interest in creating problems for India.” Fatimi warned that there wouldn’t be any improvement in Pak-Russia relations if Pakistan continues to see Russia through the prism of US.

“Pakistan made a mistake by formulating its policy towards Afghanistan on the basis of ethnic divide”, former foreign secretary Riaz Muhammad Khan said adding, “the United States too committed the mistake of declaring the Taliban beyond the pale and lumping them together with Al Qaeda.”

He believed that Pakistan still has a role in Afghanistan but only if Kabul or the coalition forces ask for it. The stability in Afghanistan is more important than seeking strategic depth or a ‘friendly government,’ the former foreign secretary maintained.

Giving an assessment of the ten-year war in Afghanistan, Prof Khalid Rehman, director general Institute of Policy Studies, said that the ultimate objective of having a neutral and stable Afghanistan cannot be achieved without withdrawal of the foreign forces from the country. He said economic development of Pakistan lies in its good neighbourly relations.

In its introductory words, Dr Riffat Hussain, chairperson Defense and Strategic Studies Department, Quaid-e Azam University, said that the event has been organised to see what options Pakistan has after the Americans leave and Pakistan could capitalise upon the potential with the Central Asian Republic.

In his concluding remarks, Imtiaz Gul, executive director CRSS, said Pakistan must protect its national interests through economic linkages in the region, instead of piling up arms. He said trade among the regional countries can bring prosperity to all the states in this part of the world.

Former Ambassador Arif Ayub, Maqsood-ul Hassan Nuri, research scholar at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Fazlur Rehman, research scholar at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and Dr Muhammad Islam also spoke on the occasion.

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