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Press Release

on

**Round Table Discussion with
Prof. Ishtiaq Ahmed**

on

“Evolving Political Dynamics of South Asia”

Prof. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Emeritus Professor at Stockholm University, Sweden and Honorary Senior Fellow of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, made an insightful presentation at a Round Table Discussion on “*Evolving Political Dynamics of South Asia*” at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi on February 26, 2013. Prof. Ahmed is a Swedish political scientist of Pakistani origin. The Roundtable was chaired by Mr. Sheel Kant Sharma, former Secretary General, SAARC.

Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, Director General of ICWA, highlighted, in his opening remarks, the importance of South Asia in India’s foreign policy calculus. Prof. Ahmed held that regionalism in South Asia, as promoted by the SAARC, had not fostered a sense of security among the member countries, unlike what the EU and the ASEAN had achieved. The SAARC has potential but needs to promote security in the region, and also promote better trade and commercial linkages.

Analysing the evolution of Pakistan’s identity problem, Prof. Ahmed alluded to the various concepts of Pakistan’s identity which have been propounded from time to time, such as: a garrison state; as part of West Asia and Islamic fraternity; Indo-Gangetic roots and its Indus Valley Civilization, and the present perception of Pakistan as part of South Asia. He remarked



Amb. Rajiv K. Bhatia, DG, ICWA and Prof. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Emeritus Professor, Stockholm University, Sweden.

that Pakistan's destiny rested with South Asia, and living in harmony with India.

Prof. Ahmed referred to the remarks of Gen. Kayani, Pakistan Army Chief, that India was no longer the No. 1 threat for Pakistan; it is domestic extremism which posed the biggest challenge. On Kashmir, he maintained that the prevalent view in Pakistan was that the Line of Control (LoC) could not be changed and that Pakistan could not get entire Kashmir. The Pakistan government, he added, was searching for a plausible explanation of this reality to offer to the people. He added that China may not back Pakistan beyond a point. The Shia-Sunni proxy-war in Pakistan has the respective support of Iran and Saudi Arabia.



(L-R) Prof. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma, former SG, SAARC and Amb. Rajiv K. Bhatia, DG, ICWA

Addressing the situation in Pakistan, the speaker referred to the mushrooming growth of madrassas; and anti-India rhetoric disseminated by the state school system. He emphasized the need to bring back the Sufi, Bhakti, and Nanak's teachings for positive

influence among the youth. His view was that China did not want Pakistan to be under the influence of the Taliban. He held that for a solution to the Kashmir issue, the Pakistani Army had to be included as an important player. The conversion of LoC into international border, he suggested, was the only practical solution as the PoK would never be returned.

Prof. Ahmed concluded the discussion on an optimistic note. His prognosis was that ten years hence, there would be greater integration in the region. Borders would become irrelevant in future and normal relations between India and Pakistan would help usher in a stable and prosperous South Asia.
