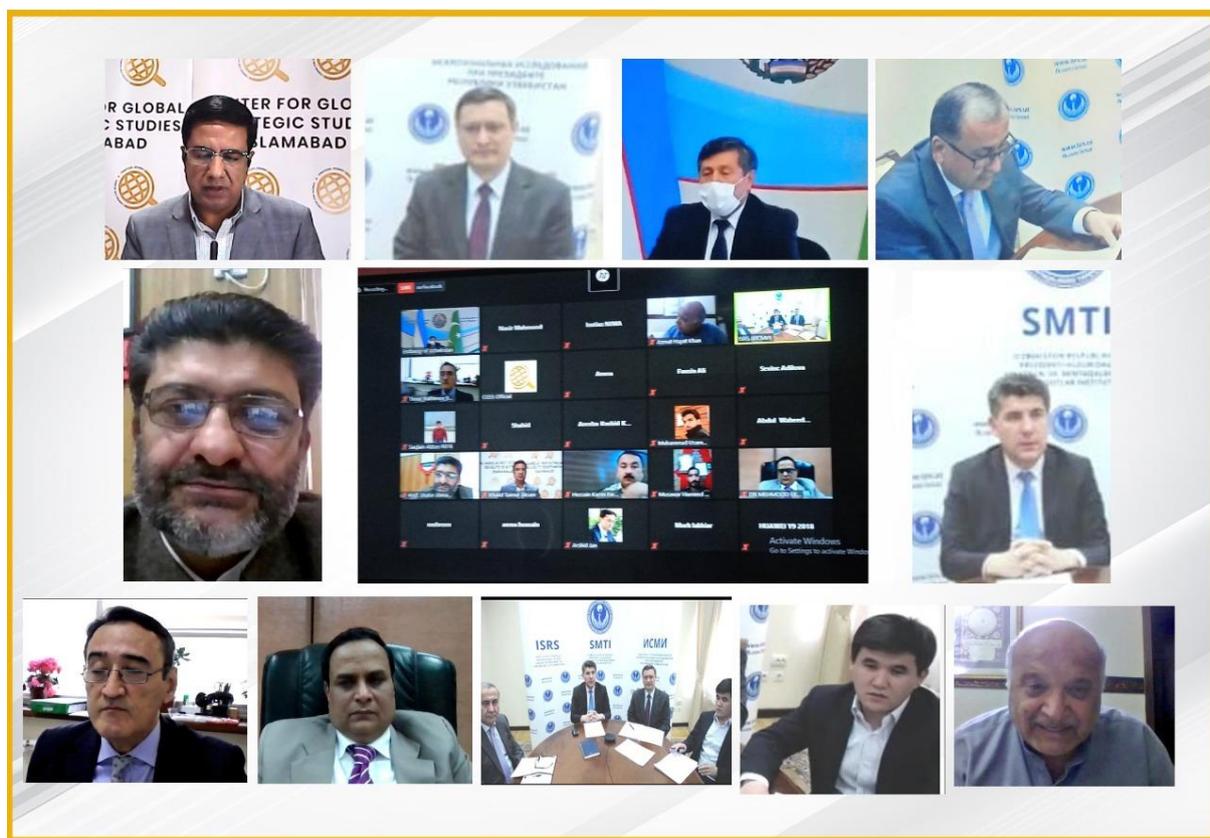




Online International Conference Report

“Regional Connectivity Strategy: Pakistan & Uzbekistan- A New Regional Commitment”



**Jointly Organized by
Center for Global & Strategic Studies, Islamabad and
Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent on
24th March, 2021**

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BRIEF OF THE CONFERENCE

On 24th March 2021, an Online International Conference on “Regional Connectivity Strategy: Pakistan & Uzbekistan-A New Regional Commitment” was jointly organized by the Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad, and the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Renowned subject experts from Pakistan and Uzbekistan will participate as Guest Speakers, the details are as below:

1. His Excellency Aybek Arif Usmanov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Pakistan
2. Mr. Akramjon Nematov, First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
3. Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan, Director of Area Study Centre (Russia China and Central Asia) University of Peshawar
4. Mr. Alisher Kadirov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
5. Mr. Timur Rakhimov, Head of department of the International Institute of Central Asia
6. Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, Member Board of Experts, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad and Regional Geopolitical Analyst
7. Mr. Rustam Khuramov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
8. Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Former Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar, Peshawar
9. Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

The conference was moderated by Mr. Sanjar Valiyev, Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and was attended by 50 participants including students and subject experts from Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It was also viewed live on social media platforms by 100 viewers.



Executive Summary/Analysis & Key-Takeaways



Executive Summary/ Analysis and Key-Takeaways

1. Regional Connectivity Strategy: Pakistan & Uzbekistan- A New Regional

Commitment:

- The world has entered into a new era of connectivity and regional cooperation. New horizons of multilateral relations among various countries have started to materialize efficiently.
- Regional connectivity is the key catchword in today's political and economic discourse. In this aspect, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have created more prospects of cooperation among regional partners.
- Pakistan has always been culturally and religiously affiliated with the Central Asian Republics, especially with Uzbekistan. In this aspect, Pakistan- Uzbekistan bilateral relations have improved significantly in recent times.
- Both states are the major stakeholders in the Afghan peace process. In this aspect, the prospects are high for multilateral cooperation in the light of strengthening connectivity between the regions of Central and South Asia.
- The cooperation of both countries is significantly moving towards establishing political trust and inclusive regional economic cooperation.
- The historical momentum and ongoing positive transformation will certainly ensure regional security and develop trans-regional connectivity between both regions.
- Connectivity as a concept encompasses air routes, roads, highways, railways links, pipelines, educational exchanges, cultural exchanges, business to business exchanges Etc. In this regard, a production network can be developed in textile, leather, automobiles, food processing and pharmaceuticals by both countries.
- Moreover, the railway line from Mazar-e-Sharif to Peshawar and main railway line ML 1 between Karachi and Peshawar can be linked to the railway line from Termiz to Peshawar would change the geo-economic of regional cooperation and integration.



- Under regional and economic connectivity, another exciting aspect is the Asian Highway 7. It starts from Yekaterinburg in Russia, crosses Tashkent, Kabul and reaches Chaman via Kandahar. However, Torkham is also linked through the highway with Kabul via Jalalabad.
- In this regard, Asian Highway 7 can be a backbone connecting Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Russia. It can also take the shape of a North-South Corridor.
- Close cooperation and smooth border crossings will enable Pakistan and Uzbekistan to benefit from the regional integration plans. For example, CAREC, BRI, Eurasian Union, TAPI and ECO due to their significant geographies in respective regions.

2. Afghanistan: A Linking Node between Central and South Asia-Uzbekistan and Pakistan's Approaches to Conflict Resolution

- Peace and stability in Afghanistan are pre-requisite for regional economic cooperation. The peace process will pave the way for meaningful political, security, trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.
- Pakistan and Uzbekistan, as immediate neighbours of Afghanistan, are the real stakeholders in the peace of Afghanistan.
- Uzbekistan can neutralize and exert pressure in Northern Afghanistan to insulate and shield different groups from the spoilers. Pakistan influences the Southern belt of Afghanistan. In this regard, both states, through a coordinated approach, can be instrumental in achieving sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan is an integral part that has promising strategies for developing the International Transport Corridor connecting Central and South Asia with seaports to the global markets.
- Afghanistan has strategic importance for a number of reasons. For example, transit potential for Central Asia, a connecting bridge between Europe and Asia with the shortest length road and regional infrastructural projects.
- The projects of Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway and Surkhan Puli-Khumri Electric power way will strengthen the beneficial partnership between regional



states. Moreover, such projects will stabilize the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan and add positively to regional security discourse.

- Uzbekistan is Afghanistan's fifth-largest trading partner. Furthermore, it is taking concrete political and diplomatic measures aimed at a peaceful solution to the Afghan crisis. In this aspect, the Tashkent conference 2018 on Afghanistan contributed to the consolidation of international efforts to resolve the Afghan issue.
- Pakistan and Uzbekistan could develop mutually beneficial cooperation in the implementation of joint economic projects in Afghanistan. Furthermore, both can integrate geopolitical interest in the active promotion of the International Transit Transport Corridor project.
- The ongoing peace process must culminate in a logical conclusion because halting the peace of negotiations will lead to chaos and instability with dire consequences for the region.
- The two parties, the Afghan Government and the Taliban regime, need to get on one table to compromises and develop consensus on future political setup leading to inclusive broad-based government, economic development and peace.
- Moreover, various spells of high official meetings have been in process in the capitals of Islamabad, Tashkent and Kabul to streamline Afghan internal grand dialogue to reach a consensus for its national wide stability, peace and harmony.
- In this context, the upcoming international conference in July 2021 titled 'Central Asia and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness, Challenges and Opportunities' in Tashkent will provide more valuable practical solutions for greater regional connectivity.

3. Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul- Peshawar Rail Route: Prospects of Uzbekistan-Pakistan Bilateral Relations in the Light of Regional Inter-connectedness

- South Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world. The region's contribution to global growth is 15%. It is expected that it may increase up to 30% by 2040. In this aspect, South Asia could become the new locomotive of the global economy.



- The trans-Afghan corridor's construction will provide a completely new transport and transit vector for Central Asia and significantly reduced export and import cost for the regional states.
- In February 2021, Uzbekistan hosted the first trilateral meeting among Uzbekistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan to construct the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway. In the meeting, a consensus was developed on the need to build an Afghan transportation route.
- In May 2021, the involved partners will prepare a feasibility study and develop mechanisms for financing and constructing the highway. In this regard, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Islamic Development Bank and US International Development Finance Corporation have expressed their readiness and support for the construction of this railway.
- Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway route will reduce delivery times for the transfer of goods to Central Asia and Europe. Once the project is fully implemented, transport from Pakistan to Uzbekistan will take only three to five days.
- The railway route would increase freight traffic. Furthermore, transporting goods through this route would generate trade volumes reaching 3-4 million tons per year. It will also enhance job opportunities.
- The project will contribute to the expansion of the transport and communication network within Afghanistan. Thereby, initiating such projects will accelerate the pace of socio-economic reconstruction in Afghanistan.
- Uzbekistan and Pakistan must establish industrial cooperation, close technological alliance, integrated production chains and significant human resource potential.
- There is an irregular bus service between Peshawar and Kabul. The distance between Peshawar and Termiz via Kabul is less than 800 km. In this regard, the bus service can be extended and regularized between Peshawar and Termiz via Kabul to increase people to people contacts.



- There is great tourism potential in both states. In this aspect, direct flights between the two countries will positively impact and enhance the avenues of soft power projection.
- The cultural, educational, and media exchanges between both states should be increased. It should be done on a priority basis through faculty/scholar exchanges, cultural exhibitions, book fairs, movies, plays and joint sports programs.
- The joint research and teaching projects are important for the region. Both countries should facilitate it to restore academic and historical linkages.
- The two Governments have to facilitate different delegations in multiple fields, including academia, business, textile, surgical equipment, pharmaceutical industry, furniture industry and sport etc to further strengthen the bilateral ties.



ANNEXURES



ANNEXURE 1: TRANSCRIPT'S OF THE SPEECHES

Welcome Remarks

His Excellency Aybek Arif Usmanov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Pakistan

Very Good Afternoon. Ladies and Gentlemen, I do congratulate our brothers and friends and partners with great Pakistan day. Which we celebrate with traditional zeal. I also do appreciate the institute of CGSS and Peshawar Area Studies and all brilliant scholars who will join us today in this very important webinar. My compliments and appreciation go to the leadership of our Institute of Strategical and Regional Studies and the President of Republic of Uzbekistan. It is a great honor for us, the Embassy to attend this webinar and to wish our scholars to present their brilliant papers on the very important issue and topics of the regional connectivity and Afghanistan conflict, and Century Project is the Mazar-e-Sharif-Peshawar Railway. I welcome all of you, ladies and gentlemen, to today's webinar. And let us start with Bismillah. Thank you very much.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director, Centre for Global and Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

On behalf of the Center for Global and Strategic Studies, I welcome all of you to this very important online conference on the Regional Connectivity between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It is new regional connectivity that is being started. I would also like to welcome all the worthy participants and speakers from Uzbekistan and various parts of Pakistan. The world has entered into a new era of connectivity and regional cooperation. New horizons of multilateral relations among various countries have started to materialize very quickly. Regional connectivity is the key catchword in today's political and economic discourse. Many countries in many parts of the region have started their regional connectivity. We in Pakistan have also started laying more emphasis on this regional connectivity due to the CPEC and Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan has always been culturally and religiously affiliated with the Central Asian states especially with



Uzbekistan. In this aspect, Pakistan- Uzbekistan bilateral relations have improved significantly in recent times. I must mention the two people who have recently been working very hard on improving the Pakistan- Uzbekistan relations. One is the Former Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Mr Sadikov. He played a very instrumental role in the last few years and now we have the new Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, he has also remained in Pakistan before. Both these gentlemen have played a very significant role in the last couple of years in enhancing this bilateral relationship. Moreover, the regional connectivity between both states has been flourishing under the guidance and prudent steps of both governments in multiple fields. For example, academic cooperation, cultural exchange, trade, transport and many other fields. I would mention President Shavkat Mirziyoyev who has held the regional connectivity with Pakistan at the top of his priority agenda points. Therefore, these kinds of webinars would not only enhance the chances of more collaboration but we can get feedback from the audience also on that how to enhance this connectivity. I would also like to thank our partners ISRS, the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for being part of this initiative. Hopefully today also we will hear good speeches and new recommendations would come up and in future also. Now, I would like to invite Mr. Akramjon Nematov, first deputy director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for his comments.

Mr. Akramjon Nematov, First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Thank you very much. Dear participants of the event, dear Pakistani friends, his Excellency our Ambassador in Pakistan, I am glad to see you all. In our next video conference, “The Leading Analytical Structures of Uzbekistan and Pakistan.” I am pleased to know that our dialogue with the leading research centres of Pakistan has acquired a traditional character. Over the past year alone despite the pandemic, we maintained regular contacts and had five online discussions with the partner on analytical structures of Pakistan on topical issues of bilateral interaction between our countries. During these events, we were able to comprehensively analyze the strategic opportunities and discuss the untapped potential of Uzbek-Pakistani cooperation. As well as develop specific proposals for the surge of development of mutually beneficial and comprehensive



interaction between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. In this regard, expressing my sincere gratitude to Pakistani friends, I would like to indicate our readiness and build up fruitful cooperation. We are always glad to share with you our vision on different topics on bilateral and regional agenda. Today's is also devoted to a very accurate issue, the prospects for bilateral Uzbek Pakistani Relations in the light of strengthening connectivity between the regions of Central and South Asia. As a role for Afghanistan in this process, their participation or the leading analysts from Uzbekistan and Pakistan highlights the importance of this webinar. Indeed, in recent years our two countries had chosen the part of restoring historical ties between our regions as an important new course of foreign policy. So, hereby I would like to highlight that fundamentally a new level of interaction in Central Asia which we are witnessing now will play a very important role as a development of regional interaction between Central and South Asia. Indeed, the countries of Central Asia are consciously going towards paths of strengthening political trust and regional economic cooperation. This is a new image of Central Asia with a completely different logic and of beneficial cooperation which is also supported by the international community. We consider this as a historical momentum and this positive transformation will certainly affect ensuring regional security and developing trans-regional connectivity between Central and South Asia. We are also observing a unique historical chance in resolving the perennial conflict in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is very important today to take advantage of the emerging situation. Recognizing the imperatives of the strategic opportunity we should support the peace process not to miss this unique chance. For this purpose, Uzbekistan and Pakistan should intensify the bilateral dialogue on all topical issues, ensuring regional security and development of ideas on strengthening inter-regional connectivity. In our opinion realization of strategic infrastructure projects in Afghanistan such as the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway project will be our great contribution, not only for the restoration of historical connectivity between our regions but also for the long-term establishment of peace in Afghanistan. This route will connect the South Asian railway system with Central Asian and Eurasian, which will form a new paradigm of international trade, economic cooperation on the continental scale. This in turn will become a solid platform for sustainable development and improving the living standards of the population of many countries. The construction of the railway will also stimulate the progressive economic goals in Afghanistan by creating tens of thousands of new jobs.



Moreover, it will be a solid and fundamental base for the development of Central and South Asian connectivity. Dear friends! For the detailed and broader discussion of the issue of trans-regional connectivity, economic recovery, and establishment of peace in Afghanistan as an initiative of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev visualizes this year. It is a plan to organize an international conference in Tashkent on the topic “Central and South Asia regional Connectivity: Challenges and Opportunities.” We believe that this event will contribute to the creation of a solid concept of foundation for closing interactions between the regions of Central and South Asia and selling the inter-regional agenda with specific projects of strategic nature. In this regard, we invite you all and Pakistani experts to participate in this event. We appreciate your vision of how to rebuild and further develop inter-dependence between the two regions. In conclusion, I would like to wish the success of the participants of our today’s webinar. I believe we will be able to work out new ideas for further deepening cooperation between our countries and the development of interregional connectivity. Thank you for your attention.



First Session

Topic: Regional Connectivity Strategy: Pakistan & Uzbekistan- A New Regional

Commitment:

Speaker 1

Prof. Dr Shabir Ahmad Khan, Director Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim. Thank you so much. Very distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Asslamuailkum and greetings from Peshawar. I am grateful to CGSS Islamabad and ISRS Tashkent for the invitation to this important event. It is indeed an honor to talk to this forum. The two most important factors that induce Pakistan and Uzbekistan to enhance connectivity are: One, their significant geographical locations in respective regions, and secondly, ongoing integration processes in the region. To capitalize on their geographies and maximize benefit from the integration processes, it is imperative that both the countries enhance mutual connectivity in this era of revival of Silk Roads. Connectivity as a concept is all-encompassing air, roads, highways, railway links, pipelines, educational exchanges media exchanges, business to business exchanges, etc. For Pakistan, we believe that connectivity with Uzbekistan means connectivity with all other Central Asian Republics as Uzbekistan borders all Central Asian Republics. Pakistan is naturally facing Central Asia and considers itself part of the process of regionalism, reinvigorated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Central Asia. Improving physical connectivity infrastructure and harmonizing, coordinating policies via Afghanistan is imperative for meaningful cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan in the short to mid and long term. Infrastructure development plays a crucial role in connectivity. One of the basic aims of connectivity must be to develop the transport and logistic corridors between Pakistan and Uzbekistan via Afghanistan through Railways and Highways and these will naturally transform into economic corridors due to agglomeration effects. A production network can be developed in the fields of textile, leather, automobiles, food processing, and pharmaceuticals by both countries. Railways are an important mode for heavy transportation. The fact is that railways, because of their advantages for bulk, containerized, and long-distance transport, play a key role in freight



movement. It is strongly recommended that both the countries expedite work on the Uzbek proposed railway line from Mazar-e-Sharif to Peshawar involving a distance of 753 km. Similarly, main railway line ML 1 between Karachi and Peshawar can be linked to Uzbek proposed railway line from Termiz to Peshawar. My paper is comprised of more of these suggestions. Another suggestion is that Asian Highway 7 starts from Yekaterinburg in Russia crosses Tashkent, Kabul and reaches Chaman via Kandahar. However, Torkham is also linked through the highway with Kabul via Jalalabad. Asian Highway 7 can be a backbone connecting Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Russia and can also take a shape of a North-South Corridor. It is also important to harmonize and coordinate cross-border policies for smooth border crossing between Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ECO Road Routes 1 to 3 up to 7 links all 10 member states up to the borders of Russia and China. This strategy should be to coordinate policies for maximum utilization of this infrastructure by both countries. Similarly, close cooperation and smooth border crossings will enable Pakistan and Uzbekistan to maximally benefit from the regional integration plans like CAREC, BRI, Eurasian Union and ECO due to their significant geographies in respective regions. The Governments of Uzbekistan and Pakistan shall announce Termiz and Peshawar as “Sister Cities” as Termiz may serve as a gateway to Central Asia while Peshawar can be a gateway to South Asia. This status will help to increase cultural, social, educational, trade and economic relations between the two cities. There is an irregular bus service between Peshawar and Kabul. This bus service can be extended and regularized between Peshawar and Termiz via Kabul for increased people to people contact as the distance between Peshawar and Termiz via Kabul is less than 800 km. There seems a gap between the people of Pakistan and Uzbekistan due to the limited cultural educational and media exchanges. These need to be enhanced on a priority basis through faculty/scholar exchanges, cultural exhibitions, book fairs, movies, plays and sports. Direct flights definitely between the two countries will have a positive impact on overall relations. The two Governments have to facilitate diversified delegations, simultaneously including academicians, business people from textile, surgical equipment, pharmaceutical industry, furniture industry, sport industry etc. to meet with their counterparts in parallel sessions and devise mechanisms for enhanced relations in their respective fields. Pakistan can provide the best academicians at the least cost as compared to the Western countries. Similarly, Uzbekistan has very good academic institutions especially in biotechnology, chemistry and other social



sciences. Pakistan can send students there instead of sending them to the West which is more expensive. Joint research and teaching projects which are important for the region can be undertaken together. For example, effects of US withdrawal from Afghanistan on the region, Eurasian integration and Iran-Saudi rivalry etc. In the academic spheres, it is needed to facilitate scholarship opportunities also and students should be integrated more into the educational domain. The Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, we run MPhil and PhD programs only. The title of the degree is MPhil and Ph.D. in Central Asian Studies though the Centre also conducts research on Russia and China. So far, the Centre has produced 83 Ph.D. scholars in Central Asia Studies and I hereby invite the scholars having a background in social sciences, arts and humanities to take admission in our MPhil and Ph.D. program here at the Area Study Centre. We will provide all the facilities available at the centre. Further work is in progress on Ali Sher Navoi Research Corner being developed with the financial assistance of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Islamabad. On behalf of the Area Study Centre University of Peshawar, I am grateful to H.E. Oybek Arif Usmanov and his team including Col Saadulla and other colleagues for providing financial assistance and reading material for the Ali Sher Navoi Research Corner at the Centre. Afghanistan is the Linking Node. For any meaningful movement between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, peace and stability in Afghanistan is a pre-requisite. Peace in Afghanistan will pave way for meaningful political, security, trade and economic relations between the two countries. The ongoing peace process must culminate in a logical conclusion because the breakdown of negotiations will lead to chaos and instability with dire consequences for the neighbors of Afghanistan. Prospects for peace in Afghanistan are bright as the peace process has gained momentum through regional support. It is encouraging that other peace processes like Moscow Format, Quad, and Istanbul Initiative are supportive of the ongoing peace process in Afghanistan. There is a realization in Central Asian Republics to play active and positive roles in ensuring sustainable peace in Afghanistan. The two parties Kabul regime and the Taliban need to be pressurized to make compromises and reach a consensus on future political setup leading to inclusive broad-based government. If a new setup comes into being as a result of the peace talks, the immediate neighbours of Afghanistan will have to support it with increased interaction and financial, trade facilitation as per their capacities. Pakistan and Uzbekistan as immediate neighbours of Afghanistan are the real stakeholders in the peace of Afghanistan and are important partners in this regard. Uzbekistan has influence



and can neutralize and exert pressure in Northern Afghanistan to insulate and shield different groups from the spoilers. Pakistan influences the Southern belt of Afghanistan and both Uzbekistan and Pakistan through a coordinated approach can be instrumental in achieving sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan. Both the countries can also help Afghanistan by increasing interaction and accelerating the process of integration via Afghanistan through the development of soft and hard infrastructure. Moreover, Sino-Russian collaboration materializing the integration of Eurasian space and concurrently reinforce the Central Asia-Pakistan integration via Afghanistan. Importantly, Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoy close cordial relations with both the regional powers. All the regional integration arrangements such as BRI, CAREC, CPEC, ECO, Eurasian Union, TAPI, CASA, Uzbekistan Trans Afghan Railway Project, energy and highway projects complement each other in terms of inclusive regional development and shared prosperity. These multi-layered processes have brightened the prospects of regional integration. Both the countries, Pakistan and Uzbekistan will remain relevant to these processes due to their geographies and can benefit maximally from all the regional integration processes through increased connectivity and cooperation. These are all my submissions. I thank you all for your attention.



Speaker 2

Mr. Alisher Kadirov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Assalam-o-Alaikum. Good afternoon dear friends and event participants. I am sincerely glad to take part in today's video conference. Pakistan for us is a close and friendly country, a reliable strategic partner. Our people are linked by historical, religious and cultural ties. Pakistan is not only a historical close neighbour but also a country, that thanks to its enormous political, economic, military, technical and human potential, favourable geopolitical position and balanced foreign policy. Today, it plays a leading role in regional policy, solving major international problems. Strengthening friendship, long-term and multi-lateral ties with Pakistan is a priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. In recent years Uzbekistan has significantly intensified cooperation with Pakistan. Since 2016, the trade between countries has grown five times. The number of tourists from Pakistan to Uzbekistan twelve times. There are one hundred twenty-five companies in Uzbekistan is the Pakistani capital. The transit of Pakistan fruits goods in the territory of Uzbekistan has grown five times. But all these figures do not represent the potential of our trade-in economic opportunities which is much greater. One of the main factors i.e., restraining the use of all the possibilities of Uzbek-Pakistan cooperation in continuing stability of the situation in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has always advocated the early establishment of peace and stability in this country. Particular attention was paid to the topic of Afghanistan in a speech of the president of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in the 75th session o the United Nations General Assembly in which he proposed to make a permanent committee at the United Nation. The main task of which was to help in socio-economic development in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan convinces that peace in this country will create favourable conditions for sustainable development of the entire Eurasian space and will give a positive impetus to strengthening trans-regional cooperation between Central and South Asia. Considering the strategic importance of peace in Afghanistan, for the security and sustainable development of Central and South Asia. We can see it is important to unite the forts of the region in promoting the peace process in Afghanistan. In this regard, the strengthening of the strategic Uzbek-Pakistani partnership can become an important factor in the settlement and will also contribute to the regional connectivity between Central and South Asia. Dear colleagues, we believe that recently the favourable condition



for the resolution of the conflicts have formed in and around Afghanistan which may lead to the establishment of long-term peace in this country. First, the consequences between the regional and world power, of the principles approach to solve the problem has significantly strengthened. This will facilitate advisory by the implementation of the provisional of the Tashkent Declaration adopted at the end of the international conference on Afghanistan in March 2018. Secondly, the signed peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban, as well as the agreement between the political leaders of Afghanistan on the creation of the inclusive government and Supreme National reconciliation. Certainly, the achievement of a high level of mutual understanding among Asian countries, the necessary conditions for solving urgent regional problems. The issue of settlement in Afghanistan and the development of the regional connectivity also raised the issue of improving further development. Further developing and deepening Uzbek Pakistani bilateral relations, bringing them to a new level. In this regard, I would like to talk about some areas of further development of Uzbek Pakistan relations. First, this is a foreign policy sphere. Our countries have regular political dialogues at various levels. Both countries mutually support each other in the international area. This contributed to the development of cooperation, coordination of approaches of International and regional issues. This situation supports further expansion of the practice of political consultation, including the development of the situation in South and Central Asia, the Middle East, and other regions. It is advisable to expand Uzbekistan-Pakistan interaction in the international arena, including helping to strengthen international formats such as SCO, ECO, OIC which have already become the pillars of global international architecture. Uzbekistan and Pakistan could significantly intensify mutual support and coordination in the fight against terrorism and religious extremism. Second, is the development of economic trade and bilateral cooperation. A document in this area has been signed between our countries. Agreement on trade and economic cooperation, simulation of mutual investments and protection of investments, avoidance of double taxation, and other services the development of trade and economic ties. But, substantial progress in this area by the countries is impossible without increasing the efficiency of the work of bilateral commissioners and control over the implementation of their decisions. In particular, the Intergovernmental Commission on trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural corporation has been working for a long time. But the last meeting on this condition took place ten years ago in 2011. The issue of concluding agreements of



preferential trade on the recognition of the result of conformity assessment of products of the simplification of these processes for representatives of business circles and tourist groups etc. requires careful consideration. It is necessary to establish industrial cooperation, create a close technological alliance, integrated production chains in those areas where Uzbekistan and Pakistan have significant human and resource potential. Special attention should be paid to strengthening the innovative component in Uzbekistan Pakistan cooperation to stimulate the business for two countries to actively participate in National import substitution programs. Our countries could develop mutually beneficial cooperation in the implementation of joint economic projects in such countries primarily in Afghanistan. Tashkent and Islamabad can come on geopolitical interest in the active promotion of the project of the International Transit Transport Corridors, which will also be diversifying regional communication projects. The launch of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway will also create a powerful platform for achieving inclusive economic development in Central and South Asia. Creation of joint ventures on the territory of the free economic zone of Termez –the Uzbek Afghan border. We were able to organize for them the production of necessary goods for Afghanistan, including textile, food, construction groups, creation of a joint pharmaceutical company in the free pharmaceutical economic zone, Boysun-Farm at the Uzbekistan-Pakistan border. This will make it possible to arrange the supply and medical equipment to Afghanistan, which is especially in demand during the pandemic. The Uzbek Pakistani cultural personal contacts are traditionally intense. It is necessary to expand the number of cultural events to involve a large audience. It is necessary to focus on this issue in cultural exchange programs that are carried out through the ministries of culture of Uzbekistan and Pakistan, providing them with support at the state level. Tourism is a promising area for collaboration. From March 19, 2019, the tourism center of Uzbekistan operates in Islamabad. In September 2021, one of the leaders of the Nashik-Bandi movement in Pakistan Haseeb Ur Rehman was appointed Ambassador of the Ziarat tourism office of Uzbekistan and Pakistan. In conclusion, I would like to say that recently in and around Afghanistan favorable condition has been formed for the resolution of the conflict in this country. Mutually beneficial cooperation with Afghanistan, peace and stability in this country will overall launch trans-regional projects in the field of transport energy, trade and strengthen the connectivity between Central and South Asia. This will



become a powerful driver of sustainable development of countries of the region and will serve to expand and deepen Pakistani and Uzbek bilateral cooperation.

I hope that today's event, recommendation and assessment presented will contribute to the achievement of over and early peace in Afghanistan and the further development of ties between the people of Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Thank you for your attention.



Second Session

Topic: Afghanistan is a link between Central and South Asia: Uzbekistan and Pakistan's approaches to conflict resolution and stabilizing the situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Speaker 1

Mr. Timur Rakhimov, Head of Department of International Institute of Central Asia

Assalam-a-Alaikum. Dear conference participants. In the beginning let me greet you all on behalf of International Institute for Central Asia. I like to use this opportunity to congratulate all Pakistani colleagues on Yom-e-Pakistan (Pakistan Day) which was celebrated yesterday. Thanks to the new foreign policy, strategy carried out under the leadership of the president of Uzbekistan, the political climate in Central Asia has changed significantly during recent years. This is an understanding that an important condition for entering regional security which will undoubtedly have an impact on the global context is the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has identified three important points for the settlement of the Afghan issue. First, the only way to peace in Afghanistan is direct dialogue. Second, negotiations should take place with the leading role of the Afghan themselves. Third, the international communities as well as the neighbouring states of Afghanistan no need to facilitate the peace process of inter-Afghan settlements. Dear colleagues, the geopolitical location of Afghanistan has historically played an important role in the interconnection between Central, South, East Asia and the Middle East. On this basis, the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan form as a single civilizational space in terms of culture, religion ethnicity and language. A number of great ancestors lived and work in Afghanistan. Today Afghanistan is seen as a key element of promising strategies for the development of the International Transport Corridor connecting Central and South Asia with seaports of the Indian ocean and with the world's main markets. Thus, Afghanistan is of strategic importance for Uzbekistan taking into account the following factors. One, increasing transit potential of Central Asia and the revival of the historical role of the region as a connecting bridge between Europe and Asia with the shortest length road. Second, joint counter-action to challenges and threats such as terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking. Third, the implementation of regional



infrastructural projects. In recent years, relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have reached an integral and apprehensive character. In our country, Afghanistan is considered an integral part of the Central Asian region and an important component in the formation of the trans-regional interconnection of Central and South Asia and the transformation of the region into the largest, transport, trade, and economic hub of the Eurasian continent. Due to the intensification of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, in recent years there has been a colossal breakthrough in bilateral trade and economic relations. Today, Uzbekistan is Afghanistan's fifth-largest trading partner. Work is underway on the projects of Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway as well as Surkhan Puli-Khumri Electric power way. No doubt that the implementation of these projects will strengthen the mutually beneficial partnership between our countries as well as stabilize the socio-economic situation both, in Afghanistan and the region of Central and South Asia. Uzbekistan is taking concrete political and diplomatic measures aimed at a peaceful solution to the Afghan crisis. The Tashkent conference on Afghanistan conducted by the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan in March 2018 contributed to the consolidation of international efforts to resolve the Afghan issue. Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform participants of this event that according to the initiative of Uzbekistan the international conference, "Central and South Asia –Regional Connectivity, Challenges and Possibilities", scheduled for July this year in Tashkent. This conference is designed to help strengthen common security and stability, create favourable conditions for discussing many important topics of our region. I believe that we have to consider Afghanistan not as a country that spreads threats for peace and stability, but as a long-term friend, partner, and neighbor. Dear participants of this conference, now this cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan has intensified. Various agreements concluded between the countries on trade and economic cooperation, mutual investments, avoiding double taxation, etc. Different meetings are held at the level of ministers and departments. In March of this year, a delegation from the Republic of Uzbekistan visited the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to acquaint with work experience of the infrastructure of the Pakistani ports and organize bilateral negotiations. During this visit, meetings were organized with the leaders of the Ministers of Maritime Affairs, The National Shipping Corporation of Pakistan, the Association of Shipping Companies, representative of the Logistic Companies as well as the Port of Qasim, Karachi and Gwadar. All this clearly shows us that the achievement of the higher goals of the



Uzbek-Pakistani cooperation will be greatly facilitated by the soonest stabilization of the situation in our neighboring Afghanistan. Thank you very much for your attention.

Speaker 2

Dr. Mehmood Hassan Khan, Regional Geo-political Analyst & Member Board of Experts, CGSS

Good afternoon and Happy Nowruz to all my Uzbek friends which indeed stand for greater connectivity, conflict resolution, peace, stability, and harmony. The topic of my speech is too big to manage in a very short session. Although I will try my best to highlight the collective sincere efforts of Pakistan and Uzbekistan for achieving the desired goals of political stability, economic sustainability, social cohesion and strategic cushion of ethnic diversity in Afghanistan so that dreams of greater regional connectivity, immense socio-economic prosperity, energy & food security and last but not least poverty eradication may be achieved as soon as possible. For centuries, Afghanistan has had been ravaged in the tussle of absolute power obsession amongst the war-lords and regional powers alike. On the other hand, geographically, it has been the only easy and shortest route for Central Asia and South Asia connectivity for which power politics has been manipulating to win the chess-board of regional supremacy. It has borders with all the neighbouring countries of Central Asia which have been dreaming of regional connectivity to overcome physical impasses. Now end game is fading and regional rivalries are in the diminishing mode, peace in Afghanistan may be secured and sustained. Uzbekistan-Pakistan bilateral relations have been further strengthened during recent times because of better political understanding, improvement in bilateral trade, phenomenal rise to tourism, and the last but not least joint effort to bring peace and harmony in the region especially in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been jointly working to achieve sustainable regional connectivity by avoiding spillover repercussions of the end game in Afghanistan. Both countries have been pursuing an Afghan own and Afghan-led solution for the future of Afghanistan, especially after the US withdrawal. While delivering a “keynote” speech in the recently held “Islamabad Security Dialogue” Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa outlined various aspects and far-reaching consequences of South and Central Asia security and connectivity. General Bajwa shared the country’s unprecedented steps to enhance Afghanistan's trade and connectivity by re-energizing Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and also



providing access to Afghanistan to export her goods to India. Improving economic and trade environment along Pak-Afghan border by establishing border markets and development of infrastructure and last but not least, being part of energy and trade corridors binding Central Asia, South and West Asia through land routes and inviting Afghanistan to be part of CPEC. Various spell of high official meetings has been in process in the capitals of Islamabad, Tashkent and Kabul to streamline the process of Afghan internal grand dialogue to reach a consensus for its national wide stability, peace and harmony. Moreover, an upcoming international conference in July 2021 titled 'Central Asia and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness, Challenges and Opportunities' in Tashkent will provide more valuable practical solutions for greater regional connectivity in the future. Uzbekistan Foreign Minister H.E. Abdulaziz Kamilov has been visiting Pakistan and meeting with his counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Prime Minister Imran Khan. During his stay he thoroughly discussed ways and means to non-military solution in Afghanistan, increase in trade and commerce and enhance bilateral cooperation in diversified sectors of the economy that showed sincere effort to bring peace in Afghanistan through regional resolve, dialogue and development. On his part, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz acknowledged Pakistan as a regional player, a power broker which can play a very effective role in guaranteeing regional peace and stability, especially in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been jointly working for a long. The journey of regional reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan started with Pakistan 6+2 and Uzbekistan's 6+3 formula, which gained great popularity and acceptance among all the main stakeholders and power brokers but ultimately, complex and complicated end game prevailed and regional prosperity remained sieged. The peace agreement of Doha has not yet been materialized because of the unending thirst for power, prioritization of personal profits, gains and taboos. Grand internal dialogue has not yet been successful because of the historic burden of inter-faith and inter-ethnic conflict, conspiracies, contradiction and destruction due to which Afghanistan has had been amid rebels and rubbles alike. The most recently held international conference in Russia provided new impetus to Pakistan and Uzbekistan efforts to achieve peace in Afghanistan by seeking assurance from the Taliban not to launch Spring Offensives against the government of Afghanistan and the main stakeholder. Before this important conference, Uzbekistan Foreign Minister H.E. Abdulaziz paid a personal visit to Tehran and Kabul and discussed different aspects of US withdrawal from Afghan soil from May 2021. Uzbek Foreign



Minister met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer and Afghanistan's top peace negotiator Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul where he discussed issues of mutual interest between the two nations with a special focus on major economic, regional and transit project, Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process and the fight against terrorism.

Uzbekistan can be the gateway for exports and import via Termez Cargo Center, rail and road and Navoi International Airport. Uzbekistan and Pakistan have been providing substantial economic, political and diplomatic support to the people and government of Afghanistan to settle their differences and to reach a substantial stable peace in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been a stumbling factor for greater regional connectivity which must be now resolved for greater regional integration, prosperity, and poverty eradication for which Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been jointly playing an important role. So, in the session of discussion, we will share my innovative ideas to achieve further regional connectivity and socioeconomic prosperity in the days to come. Thank you.



Third Session:

Topic: Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul- Peshawar rail route. Prospects of Uzbekistan-Pakistan bilateral relations in the light of region interconnectedness

Speaker 1

Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Peshawar and Founder of the Centre of Central Asia Studies.

Thank you very much. I am grateful to the Centre for organizing this conference and the fact Area Study Centre Peshawar was the first one to make inroads into Central Asia and especially to Uzbekistan. We have many agreements signed with them and I was a regular visitor to the institute and we would get regular scholars from Uzbekistan and we have worked on joint projects so there is a lot of potentials and a lot of scopes. I am grateful to the ambassador. He is an old friend of mine. He's been working on relations between the two countries for a very long. I welcome my Uzbek friends. My paper is mostly on the importance of Uzbekistan and Pakistan relations and how important Central Asia is to us. Trade and cultural links and exchange of knowledge between Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent went on since time immemorial. Bukhara, Qarshi, Khoja, Tashkent were the centres of learning long before Islam. Bukhara means a monastery it was a centre of learning long before Islam. Knowledge, scholars and traders came from Central Asia to Indian Subcontinent for herbs, spices which they carried their research and buy food that was not grown in their land. Although the trade was on camels and mules it played a very important role in the economic development of this region. Many new cities or commercial centres were established because of this trade and some are still there and many madrassas and seats of learning were created. Along with the business caravans, there was a constant flow of scholars and knowledge going both ways. We have a Yunani factory which is still known by the name of Qarshi. So, a lot of people didn't know that Qarshi was a city in Uzbekistan and knowledge originated there. Historically this route has a lot of significance and the old theory on which volumes are written would be revived. Uzbeks are once known as the chosen people of God by many scholars and the born rules of Central Asia, this theory would be revived. Uz means individual and Bek means a Khan. So, all Uzbeks are Khans in their place and they don't accept or believe in



other people so they were very independent and they are chosen. Some scholars called them the chosen people of God. The whole region has developed enormously and the resources and living standards have gone a long way. Time and distance have no longer a problem and its communication and interaction bring people together and nations gain prosperity. Uzbekistan is extremely rich in minerals and natural resources. Titanium from which aircraft are made is found in abundance along with other rare metals. The era of geo-politics has gone. Now is the age of or era of geo-economics. Contacts and diplomacy are done on an economic basis. Wherever a country has an economic interest they develop diplomatic relations and this economic interest is given more priority than strategic. Pakistan's future lies in Asia and with its neighbours and not with the West. The East has an abundance of resources, both food and natural resources and rare minerals. One should follow the Chinese example to put all its differences in cold storage and strive for economic development. If Uzbekistan and Pakistan are connected by train through Afghanistan all these countries would benefit. Afghanistan would have jobs plus their products would not only be sold in the neighbouring countries but internationally as well. The time in carrying goods to each other countries would be cut by more than half. Uzbekistan's cotton, vegetable, fruits can have a bigger market and can even be exported to the Gulf countries via Gwadar and Karachi. The same goes for Afghanistan, their fruit can reach the markets in time. Many new industries would come up like textile. Uzbekistan has an abundance of cotton which is very rare in quality, and from what I have seen much of it is wasted, whatever they pick up they do it but the rest is wasted. Then food dehydration is the technology that we learn from the Uzbeks. Packing, drip irrigation, desert farming. There is a lot one can learn from Uzbekistan and they have a cotton research farm which I visited along with our people so we can learn a lot plus establish textile industries. The railway line is completed on time will bring economic and industrial revolution in all these regional countries. It would serve as a chain of peace leading to the prosperity of the region. Thank you very much. This was all I could say for the time being and it's nice to see you all.



Speaker 2

Mr. Rustam Khuramov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Dear colleagues, I am glad to meet you all. It is an honour for me to speak in this discussion. In my take, I would like to briefly share with you the benefits of Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Central Asian and South Asian constructional scheme Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway. As you know last month Uzbekistan hosted the first trilateral meeting on Uzbekistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan about the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway. In this meeting, there is a solitary-lateral consensus reached on the need to build the Afghan transportation route. Moreover, a joint plan for the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway was signed. By May, the parties expect to prepare a feasibility study and develop mechanisms for financing and construction of the highway. In other words, an important set forward has been made towards the implementation of the project of the century of the region. The World Bank, ADB, EBRD, IDB and US International Development Finance Corporation have all expressed the readiness and support for the construction of this railway. In other words, funding appears achievable. In this case, Afghanistan was connecting link between Central and South Asia and is becoming a symbol of not of the next stage of military confrontation, but, of mutually beneficial inter-regional cooperation. From the standpoint of Uzbekistan and Central Asian countries, the vast opportunities for economic engagement with South Asia are driving by regions' macroeconomic performance and growth of the combined population of 1.9 billion people and GDP of 3.5 trillion dollars. South Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world. Today the region's contribution to global growth is 15% and by 2040 it may increase up to 30%. In this case, South Asia could become the new locomotive of the global economy. This is very important for the rising export-oriented economy of Uzbekistan. In this case, the construction of the trans-afghan corridor will provide a completely new transport and transit vector for Central Asia and significantly reduced export and import costs for the countries of the region. For example, the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway route will reduce delivery times for goods to Central Asia and Europe. Once the project is fully implemented the transport from Pakistan to Uzbekistan will not take sixty-five days, but, only three to five days. Moreover, according to preliminary estimates, the cost of



transporting a container from Tashkent to Karachi will approximately be thousand and four hundred US dollars, compared with the two thousand six hundred US dollars on Tashkent Bandar Abbas Road. Continuing this logic and an increase in the profitability of transportation will automatically contribute to an increase in freight traffic. Routing goods through Uzbekistan from South Asia to the CIS countries and Europe should generate volumes reaching 3 and 4 million tons per year. This Railway will also create a powerful platform for economic development in Central and South Asia. The means of new jobs at the construction of a roadside infrastructure at the potential for the development of rich mineral resources along the railroad. The project will also contribute to the expansion of the transport and communication network within Afghanistan. Moreover, the line will become part of the broader infrastructure connectivity of Central and South Asia. The implementation of such projects and economic benefits from them will increase the interest of both the participants of the inter-Afghan conflict and external forces in the peaceful settlement of the Afghan crisis and early stabilization, of the situation. With the financial benefits, the parties will realize that trading is much more profitable than fighting. Regional consents built on the trans will be far stronger than any political agreement or geopolitical deal. Therefore, by supporting the establishment of Afghanistan as a bridge connecting Central Asia and South Asia, we are also solving not only socio-economic and transport communication problems, but also making a significant contribution to ensuring regional security and stability of these regions. Thank you for your attention.



ANNEXURE 2: PRESS RELEASE

On 24th March 2021, an Online International Conference on “Regional Connectivity Strategy: Pakistan & Uzbekistan-A New Regional Commitment” was jointly organized by the Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad, and the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The online conference was commenced with the welcome remarks by **His Excellency Aybek Arif Usmanov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Pakistan**. He appreciated the initiative of organizing the conference & expressed his gratitude to the institutions for their participation in enhancing bilateral ties between Uzbekistan & Pakistan. His Excellency also mentioned that this conference will identify new areas of cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan and also suggest the role of both countries in the Afghanistan peace process.

In his opening remarks, **Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad** stated that Regional connectivity is the key catchword in today’s political and economic discourse. Pakistan has a cultural and religious affinity with the Central Asian Region and in this aspect, Pakistan-Uzbekistan bilateral relations have significantly improved in recent times. He emphasized that it is the need of the hour to effectively implement and execute the practical aspects of joint projects that interconnect all regional partners.

Mr. Akramjon Nematov, First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan also shared his point of view. He highlighted that Pakistan and Uzbekistan must support bilateral dialogue for the Afghan peace process. This support should also be extended and highlighted on all international platforms as well.

This will initiate a new paradigm of international trade, regional connectivity, and economic cooperation in the region. Furthermore, it will become a pathway for sustainable development and progressive economic growth in Afghanistan. He appreciated Pakistan’s vision for building and developing bilateral ties between Pakistan and Uzbekistan to maximize benefits and to capitalize on the geographical importance of this region.



Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan, Director of Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar highlighted that For Pakistan connectivity with Uzbekistan means connectivity with all other CARs. Pakistan is naturally facing Central Asia and considers itself part of the process of regionalism reinvigorated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Central Asia. He also mentioned that it is also important to harmonize and coordinate cross-border policies for smooth border crossing between Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It will result in Pakistan and Uzbekistan maximally benefit from the regional integration plans like CAREC, BRI, Eurasian Union, and ECO due to their significant geographies in respective regions.

He suggested faculty/scholar exchanges, cultural exhibitions, book fairs, movies, plays and sports, and direct flights between the two countries for a positive impact on overall relations.

Mr. Alisher Kadirov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan discussed possibilities of Uzbekistan and Pakistan cooperation for the peace process in Afghanistan. He emphasized that Uzbekistan has always wished for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Economic and regional cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia is important for peace and stability in Afghanistan and the entire region.

He also emphasized that there are significant cultural ties between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. These cultural ties must be explored and highlighted by initiating cultural exchange programs between both countries. He also briefly discussed the positive impacts of the Mazar-e-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar rail route and its potential role in the economic development of the region.

Mr. Timur Rakhimov, Head of Department of the International Institute of Central Asia suggested measures for the Afghanistan peace process. He was of the view that first and foremost, dialogues and negotiations must take place on a national and regional level. The International community and neighbors of Afghanistan can play a significant and crucial role in the smooth peace process for Afghanistan.

He emphasized that the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan share a mutual bond based on culture, religion, and traditions. Today, Afghanistan is seen as the key element for enhanced international transport that will eventually connect Central Asia and South



Asia. Furthermore, the implementation of the Mazar-e-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar rail route will provide an opportunity for mutually beneficial partnerships.

Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, Member Board of Experts, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad and Regional Geopolitical Analyst stated that Uzbekistan-Pakistan bilateral relations have been further strengthened during recent times because of the better political understanding, improvement in bilateral trade, phenomenal rise to tourism and joint efforts to bring peace and harmony in the region especially in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been jointly working to achieve sustainable regional connectivity by avoiding spillover repercussions of the end game in Afghanistan. Both countries have been pursuing an Afghan own & Afghan-led solution for the future of Afghanistan, especially after the US withdrawal.

He emphasized that Afghanistan has been a stumbling factor for greater regional connectivity which must be now resolved for greater regional integration, prosperity, and poverty eradication for which Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been jointly playing important roles.

Mr. Rustam Khuramov, Head of the Department of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan highlighted that Afghanistan is becoming a symbol of cooperation in the region. From the point of view of Central Asia, many opportunities must be explored. He highlighted that South Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world when it comes to its international cooperation, GDP growth, and contribution to the global economy.

He further highlighted the positive aspects of the Mazar-e-Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar rail route and stated that the establishment of many new industries, creation of job opportunities, reduced travel time between Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan will be achieved. Roadside infrastructure, trade opportunities, and a significant contribution to regional stability and security will also be a result of this train route.

Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Peshawar highlighted that Bukhara has a rich historical and cultural background. Business caravans, many



scholars, and traders utilized this region for their trade and economic activities. He also emphasized that even today, Uzbekistan is rich in minerals and natural resources.

Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan was of the view that the year of geopolitics is gone and now is the age of geo-economy. Diplomacy is now done based on economic ties and partnerships. Furthermore, Pakistan's future lies with Asia and its neighbors. He also mentioned that if Uzbekistan and Pakistan are connected with the rail route it will benefit Afghanistan and the entire region. The rail route will open trade opportunities. The products of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan will have a global reach. He specifically mentioned the cotton, fruits, and vegetables produced by Uzbekistan that can be exported to the Gulf countries. Infrastructure and industrial development is also an important aspect that will create job opportunities for the people of Afghanistan, proving to be a positive step towards economic stability.

The conference was moderated by **Mr. Sanjar Valiyev, Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan**, and was attended by 50 participants including students and subject experts from Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It was also viewed live on social media platforms by 100 viewers.

ANNEXURE 3: MEDIA COVERAGE

1. Pakistan Economic Net

<https://pakistaneconomicnet.com/story/16806/>



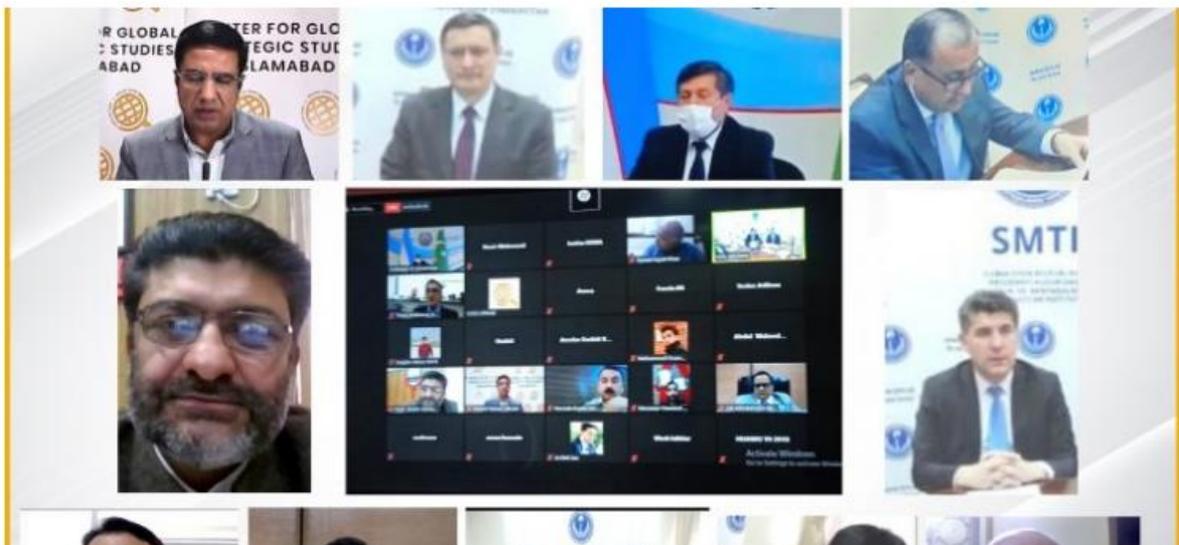
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2. Daily Islamabad Post

<https://islamabadpost.com.pk/cgss-isrs-orgnaiez-conference-on-regional-connectivity-strategy-pakistan-uzbekistan-a-new-regional-commitment/>

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3. Diplomatic News Agency

<https://dnanews.com.pk/cgss-isrs-orgnaiez-conference-on-regional-connectivity-strategy-pakistan-uzbekistan-a-new-regional-commitment/>

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4. Centreline

<https://centreline.com.pk/2021/03/24/cgss-isrs-orgnaiez-conference-on-regional-connectivity-strategy-pakistan-uzbekistan-a-new-regional-commitment/>



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Pakistan WORLD NEWS

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5. Dispatch News Desk

<https://dnd.com.pk/online-intl-conference-on-regional-connectivity-strategy-pakistan-uzbekistan-a-new-regional-commitment/242614>



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Central Asia and Eastern Europe

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By **Mati Ullah** - March 24, 2021

6. The Dailymail

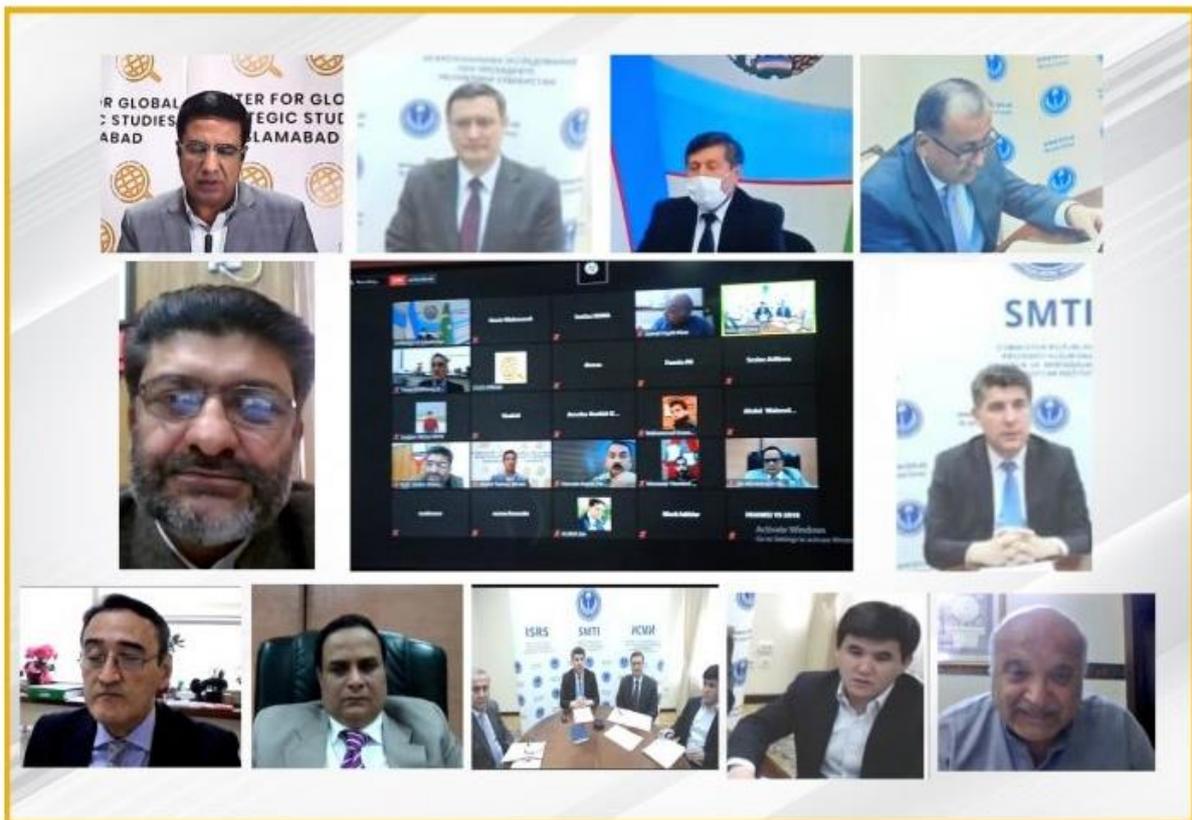
<https://dailymailnews.pk/2021/03/25/virtual-conference-on-pakistan-uzbekistan-a-new-regional-commitment-held/>

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Virtual conference on Pakistan & Uzbekistan – A New Regional Commitment held

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7. Dunyo News (Information Agency of Uzbekistan)

https://dunyo.info/en/site/inner/isrs_uzbekistan_and_pakistan_experts_discussed_the_issues_of_development_connectivity_between_central_and_south_asian-mz2



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ISRS: Uzbekistan and Pakistan experts discussed the issues of development connectivity between Central and South Asian



TASHKENT, March 26. /"Dunyo" IA/. On March 24, Uzbekistan – Pakistan videoconference has been held on "Strategy of regional connectivity: Uzbekistan – Pakistan. New regional course", reports "Dunyo" IA correspondent.

The event, organized by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan