Pakistan
a perspective, irrespective

A talk by Idris Kothari

Thursday, 12 March, 2020 - Karachi

SOCIETY FOR
GLOBAL MODERATION
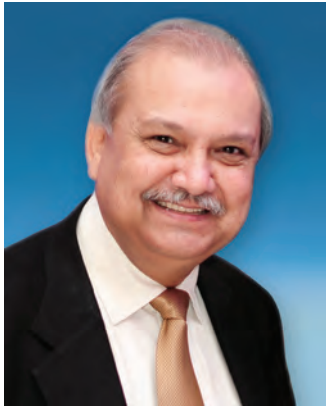Strengthening Tolerance, Interfaith Harmony and Democracy

CHANGING ATTITUDES
ENHANCING VALUES
SOCIETY FOR GLOBAL MODERATION

Chairman's Note

Society for Global Moderation (SGM) was set up as a think tank to forward the concept of tolerance, interfaith harmony and democracy in society. It was in the aftermath of 9/11 that the idea came to me and I shared it with a few friends. They agreed that there was a need for a platform which should aggressively counter the narrative of extremism and intolerance being spread by the West.

The Society for Global Moderation (previously known as The Moderates) was established in 2003. It promotes Pakistani society – and people around the world – as generally peace-loving and tolerant.

SGM is not against any religion, custom or creed and supports a society based on moderation. To further its viewpoint, it has been inviting prominent scholars and thinkers from around the world to speak on subjects that are in conformity with its ideals.

Among these are: **Walter Russell Mead**, US foreign policy expert, who has served as the Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. Subject: *'India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.'* **Marguerite H. Sullivan**, US Public Affairs and Communications Specialist and Director of the Center on International Media Assistance. Subject: '*Media Freedom and Sustainable Democracy'*. **Jacqueline Novogratz**, founder and CEO of Acumen Fund. Subject: *'Philanthropy and Leadership'*. **Vishakha Desai**, President Asia Society. Subject: *'Pakistan's Perception among the U.S. Populace.'* **Dr. Zaheerul Islam**, Islamic scholar. Subject: *'Islam in a Modern State.'*

Syed Jawaid Iqbal
Founding Chairman

Najmuddin Shaikh, Pakistan foreign secretary. Subject: '*Foreign Policy Challenges and the New Government'*, **Senator Raza Rabbani**, former Chairman, Pakistan Senate. Subject: *'18th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan.'* **Dr. Mehtab A. Karim**, renowned demographer. Subject: *'Is the Population Bomb Ticking in Pakistan?* **Sen (r) Javed Jabbar,** former minister. Subject: *'Pakistan-India Relations – Future, Known and Unknown'*. **Dr. Moonis Ahmar**, former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Karachi University. Subject: *'Post-Indian Elections Scenario: Challenges and Options for Pakistan.'* and **Sen. (r) Nisar Memon**, former federal minister. Subject, *'Does Karachi Belong to Anyone?'*

It is a fact that despite Prime Minister Imran Kan's tireless efforts to develop the country on modern lines and to attract the Pakistani Diaspora to the country, there are many obstacles that dog his path. SGM took advantage of the presence of Idris Kothari in Pakistan and invited him to give a Talk on the topic: 'Pakistan: a perspective, irrespective.'

Highlights of the Talk, along with the audience's questions, answers and comments are included in this brochure.

Speaker's Profile

Idris Kothari serves as the Chief Technology Officer at Vertical Systems Inc. He is both an innovative scientist and a visionary entrepreneur. He co-founded and held senior engineering positions at several successful high-tech start-up firms - notably VPNet Technologies, VIA Technologies, and SLI Systems - that focused on such specialized areas as PC chip-sets, Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), search engine optimization (SEO), and application-specific integrated circuits (ASICs). He is a founding member and Chairman of OPEN (Organization of Pakistani Entrepreneurs and Professionals) Silicon Valley, a non-profit organization that promotes entrepreneurship and leadership among Pakistani-American residents of the area. He served as President of Silicon Valley. He is also a board member of several other civic groups, including the NED Alumni Association of Silicon Valley and Friends of the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), USA.

Idris Kothari

From 2002 to 2005, Kothari served on the first global board of directors of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) and helped to start TiE chapters in Karachi and Lahore. Mr. Kothari earned two undergraduate degrees in Karachi - one in physics at SM Science College and the other in electrical engineering at NED Engineering University. He earned a master's degree in computer science at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

Idris is a founding member, past president, and current Chairman of the board of OPEN Silicon Valley. He has over 35 years of professional and entrepreneurial experience and is currently working as the CTO and member of the board of VSi, providing software as a service (SaaS) for hospitality and medical industries.

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T he founding Chairman of the Society for Global Moderation, Syed Jawaid Iqbal, welcomed Mr. Idris Kothari for sparing time to speak to the members of SGM and other distinguished guests at a Talk entitled 'Pakistan, a Perspective, Irrespective' held at CMC on 12 March, 2020.

In his Talk, Idris Kothari said Pakistan was a nation of phenomenal people. He said change had come to the country and there were good times ahead. He mentioned Intel that makes the processors for Microsoft and Apple computers and said he had worked for them for about 5 years in Silicon Valley and had then decided to start his own business. He had contributed in the design of the first PC chipset while the term VPN was coined by a Pakistani. Kothari said that while building companies and becoming financially successful, he had always remembered the people who had helped him in his early years.

He said Pakistan now had a leader who was honest and sincere. Pakistan also had a whole body of youth which was very energetic and mathematical-minded. He said the world was short of 85 million IT workers because Europe was not producing many children and all the baby boomers were moving up in age and retiring.

Idris Kothari said Imran Khan was a leader who had gone out and recruited some of the best and brightest people from around the globe, especially from the Silicon Valley, to head Pakistan's digitalization programme. He said that within a year or two, digitalization would improve so much that people would not have to go to the banks to pay their bills – and services will be better and better. He said the Nadra database would also get better.

Kothari said Pakistan now has the opportunity of a lifetime as a nation to make a change and was of the view that one small change will make the difference as change had now arrived. He said it was time to act and asked

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everyone to do one small thing for the nation. He said, "There are 220 million of us. If we started to pick up one pound of garbage from the streets, the entire country would be clean. If we started to help in any way, shape or form, for the common good and not in self-interest, this country will change".

Kothari said he firmly believed in what he could do for the country and he was absolutely positive that he was not alone. He said there is a saying in America that one could take a person out of Pakistan but one could not take Pakistan out of the person. He said Pakistanis were very dedicated to their country. He said he had worked with the Indians and found that they did not have even half the attachment to their country as the Pakistanis did.

Idris remarked that he worked both for President Arif Alvi's and Imran Khan's digitalization programmes and saw that Pakistan had a big asset. He could see that there were at least a million Pakistanis who lived away from Pakistan but were willing to help as they were highly educated and highly motivated.

"If we organize the Pakistani Diaspora, which is all over the world, I think, we can make a big difference and that's what I intend to do," he said.

"There is a saying in America that one could take a person out of Pakistan but one could not take Pakistan out of the person."

Q&A and Comments

Farah Mehboob

Farah Mehboob, **Lecturer, IBA, Karachi.**
Question: I see a frustration in my students that when they go out in the market, they have to make compromises and not follow what they have been taught. There is a gap between our academia and our corporate world. Why is it so?

Answer: I am introducing the concept of upscaling. India exports 150 billion dollars in software manpower. Pakistan exports one billion. Our ratio of population is 5 to 1. There is something wrong. Either we are not as smart or we are doing something wrong. Graduates come to us who know mathematics and they know their subject very well. Between PowerPoint and Python, there is a long distance. The Tatas, Birlas and Reliance Group put their money into technology at the end of the last century. Those were the Y2K times. We did not. We cannot change that as they are too far ahead so what we can do is meet them at the next intersection. We have to leapfrog – and that is what artificial intelligence, block chain, data sciences, machine learning, etc. is. Why is it important for Pakistan? It's the mathematical gene and if you understand statistics, you could use artificial intelligence to compete with the Americans because it's a new field. Even the American universities are having a difficult time keeping up with the latest subjects. There was a time when the product changed in 5 years or 10 years. Today my iPhone Eleven will be obsolete in 2 months. So how do you keep up with that demand? In the US, there is a new concept called 'boot camps' which, in a very short time, prepares the graduates for the exact job they would be doing after they graduate.

Work ethics is one of the biggest deficiencies in our young generation. *Chalta Hai* is a very common expression. I don't think in the kind of technology we are talking about, *Chalta Hai* would work!

Sharjeel Syed

Sharjeel Syed, Mechanical Engineer.
Question: In this era of artificial intelligence, what are the opportunities for a mechanical engineer?

Answer: Software engineering does not require you to have a software engineering degree. If you have a mind to write software, you can be a musician, a housewife, or a mechanical engineer or you could even be a high school graduate or a high school dropout. If you can write code and your mind works in a certain way, you can work on software. When we advertise, we don't ask for any degrees - people just come in and take a test. We, as a nation have to learn that we must value knowledge and not certificates. We have a degree inflation. Everybody has a degree but there is a lack of knowledge.

Faisal Siddiqui

Faisal Siddiqui, Perception Management Professional.
Comment: I studied computer languages at the university and I agree that it is one's mind that has to be inclined towards computer languages.

Question: We all know the magnitude of the Pakistani Diaspora, the entrepreneurial and bright minds that we have working in UK, USA, Canada and all over the world. How do you suggest these people could be synergized so that they could be of benefit to Pakistan?

Answer: We are asking the government to create a database. We have a wonderful database called Nadra. They have done a fantastic job. We need to take a step further – even with my American citizenship I have a NICOP card, so Nadra knows about me. What they should do now is go out there and seek a little more information, like how could overseas Pakistanis help and how much time each would give to the country? We are asking them to build a database. The Prime Minister has a small group led by Tania Aidrus from Google, which is doing a very good job.

Sumair Aftab

Sumair Aftab, Corporate Communications Professional.
Question: You mentioned that the Pakistani Diaspora is contributing in one way or the other. What do you think is required as far as the brain drain issue is concerned – the intelligent students of our country go abroad for studies or work purposes. Would it be a good idea to attract these Pakistanis back? What about the students who leave the country altogether?

Answer: Out of 45 thousand students that graduate in computer sciences every year, only 5,000 find a job worthy of their stature or their educational level. Forty thousand are running around and looking for a job, so brain drain is better than brain in the drain. If the top 5 percent go out of the country, who will fill their jobs – the next 5 %. So brain drain does not mean anything.

Ishtiaq Ali Mekhri

Ishtiaq Ali Mekhri, journalist.
Question: There is always talk that Pakistanis living abroad should come back to serve their country. The initiative has been taken from time to time. The intention is there, the need may also be there but when people try to come back, there are many impediments – political lack of interest and bureaucratic red tapism. What needs to be done to channelize those who want to come back for the country's benefit?

Answer: We as a nation have dodged our responsibilities – we want the government to do everything. And we don't pay taxes. We want the system to do everything for us. That is a lost cause. Even the Americans can't work with their government. Red tape is twice as bad in America. Expats should not come home expecting to work with the government.

Andy Merchant

Andy Merchant, former President, Canada-Pakistan Business Council.
Question: I was involved in bringing many Pakistanis back to the country but unfortunately there was nothing for them here. They may have succeeded in other countries but they failed in their own country. There is no mechanism here that provides for such people to contribute. I would like to know how we can get that one percent back who can help in building Pakistan?

Answer: Two universities in England – and you know those names – built the country. Two in America – Harvard and Yale – built that country and they precede the country – there was no America when Harvard was built. Two universities can make the difference. There is only one country in the world where universities are not funded by the government – they are funded by private organizations – and that is the United States. If we simply follow that model – we copy all the bad habits of Americans – how about copying some good ones? The key is that if we create institutions that will outlast our generations, then that will be something to leave behind as a legacy.

Syeda Areeba Rasheed

Syeda Areeba Rasheed, Corporate Communications Professional.
Question: Many entrepreneurs are still struggling in Pakistan. What is the way forward for them?

Answer: Entrepreneurship means struggle. It's a good thing. I am suggesting setting up of incubation centres where young entrepreneurs can learn from senior entrepreneurs about how to start companies, mostly in technology and transportation, like Airlift and Careem. One good startup is a water-cleansing company which is funded by the Hashwanis. So, I am very encouraged by Pakistan's future. Good days are ahead, keep struggling because money is on the way.

Haroon Rasheed

Haroon Rasheed, Graphic Design Professional.
Question: You say the Nadra database is a fantastic asset that Pakistan has as it has information about all Pakistanis, even overseas Pakistanis who have NICOP cards. How can we use this database to access Pakistani citizens who could help the country?

Answer: Yes, the Nadra database is something that the Pakistan government can use very effectively. It has information about all Pakistani citizens, like their name, gender, permanent address and what profession they belong to. The best thing is that this information is available to Nadra even in case of overseas Pakistanis. If the individual still has Pakistani citizenship, the information can be accessed very easily. But even if the person has adopted another citizenship but is still a NICOP-holder (National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis) the government can trace the individual easily and find out if the person's expertise suits its requirements and how much time this person can give.

Media Coverage

14 MAR 2020

13 MAR 2020

پاکستان کے پچھلے دن آنے والے ہیں۔امریکی ماہر کی خوشخبری

The Financial Daily

Change has arrived Pakistan, says Koth

KARACHI: Idris Kothari, a leading Pakistani-American entrepreneur from the Silicon Valley, addressed the members of Society for Global Moderation (SGM) and other guests at a Talk in Karachi. The subject was "Pakistan, a Perspective, Irrespective", says a Press release.

Kothari was of the view that there were very good times ahead for Pakistan as the country was at a point when all the stars were lined up in its favour, it had an honest leader and phenomenal youth which was very energetic and intelligent.

Idris Kothari said that change had arrived in Pakistan and every Pakistani should, in some small way, do something for the country. Since there are 220 million people in the country, it could make a lot of difference. He said if everyone acted for the common good and not in self-interest, the country would change in a big way.

Kothari said he was a firm believer in his own abilities and was confident that he was

"پاکستان میں تبدیلی آگئی" اور ادریس کوٹھاری

پاکستان میں تبدیلی آ گئی ہے، ادریس کوٹھاری

SOUTHASIA   FORUM

CHANGE HAS ARRIVED IN PAKISTAN
– Idris Kothari

A people that elect corrupt politicians, imposters, thieves and traitors are not victims… but accomplices

— *George Orwell*

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