[CPEC in 2019](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2018/cpec-in-2019%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)

Yasir Habib Khan December 29, 2018 the nation

With robust momentum of 2018’s development packages, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is all set to go into high gear in 2019 by establishing Pakistan’s first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), multiple youth skills development plans and massive poverty alleviation schemes especially in Balochistan,

Interior Sindh and South Punjab and KPK’s marginalized regions including FATA and various agencies.

Next year will also mark the completion of most awaited western and eastern routes of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. These two routes will connect eventually deep-sea port of Gwadar to Chinese border. The eastern route will pass through Makran coastal highway, Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Multan, Lahore, Islamabad, Mansehra, Thakot, Raikot to Khunjarab while the western route will pass through Gwadar, Turbat, Bismah, Surab, Qalat, Quetta, Zhob, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Peshawar and Islamabad onward.

The procedures of SEZ and socio-economic strategies have already been mapped out in 8th Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), highest forum and decision making body of China Pakistan Economic Corridor, 57th China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Progress Review meeting and cabinet approval with consensus.

Rashakai Special Economic Zone, flagship project of industrial development framework, is highly likely to see the light of day within next 100 days. Located in M-1 Nowshera in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and spanning over 1000 acres, it will house the industry of fruit, food, packaging, textile stitching and knitting. While delegation of China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) and Islamabad Chamber of Commerce of Industry which met recently see its potential in industries of metal processing, automobile, construction material, electronics and leather. As per CPEC secretariat, it will be connected airport, dry port, Railway Station, Motorway, highway and City Center which is 15km away.

As per initial connotation of Rashakai SEZ which follows the spirit of 2013 incentive policy, Finance Bill 2016 and Gawadar free zone industrial policy, both Chinese and Pakistani investors will enjoy incentives of importing plant and machinery without customs duty. Government may share the payment of 50 percent markup on loans with investors to be investing in SEZ. They will be given level playing field to purchase land in SEZ. Mode of mechanism, in major cases, will be centered on a joint venture, a public-private partnership, private or public. It is highly likely that SEZ will set 60-40 employability formula between Chinese and Pakistanis people.

Already the employment proportion may be seen in two infrastructure projects. The KKH phase II and Sukkar-Multan section engage 70 per cent Pakistani and 30 per cent Chinese workers, CPEC official said.

 “SEZs policy approach is to develop backward and forward linkages with its local economy. There will be a thrust on connecting businesses in SEZs with local businesses and with technology transfer, and skills development to revolutionize industrialization,” he said. Internationally,  the first modern free-trade zone came into being at Shannon Airport, Ireland in 1959. China introduced a zone near Hong Kong in 1980. Approximately 4,300 SEZs are operational in today’s world. Two decades back, there were just 500.

In line with PTI government’s priorities, Chinese government has put more focus on poverty-alleviation sector employing pro-poor policies in those regions which remained under-developed and under-privileged during CPEC’s five years. Seeking inspiration of Chinese’s miracle of lifting 700 million people out of poverty, CPEC will accelerate efforts to stamp out poverty in the areas of Balochistan, South Punjab, North Sindh and Fata, says Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiyar flanked by Deputy Ambassador Zhao Lijian in a program CPEC Times aired on PTV.

Showing up upbeat, he said “Pakistan has stepped up strenuous efforts for industrial cooperation framework agreement to revive manufacturing sector and industrialization through 9SEZs””.  “Pakistan imports $ 18 billion from China. If Chinese companies install their units in SEZs, it will be win-win situation for both Chinese and Pakistan manufacturers.”

CPEC has also outlined youth skills development initiatives to benefit 12 million young population. As per new National Human Development Report, Pakistan has youth bulge with 64pc young people below the age of 30.

In collaboration with National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC), National Training Bureau (NTB) and CPEC, plan is afoot to equip the youth with technical expertise to operate local and international industrial machinery. Pivot is on construction sector, agriculture, health paramedics business & Information Technology (IT) and hospitality & tourism, media related trades and fashion & beauty. They will also be provided state of art hands on experience in manufacturing industry includes textile (home textile fabrics garments knitwear & hosiery) sports goods leather goods glass ceramics & pottery and surgical instruments manufacturing.

CPEC will also play its significant role in Prime Minister’s Hunarmand Pakistan Programme & Prime Minister’s Youth Skill Development Programme tapping less developed areas.

Three batches of this programme have been successfully completed targeting the provision of hands on skills in marketable trades to 25 000 youth in each batch in a process to benefit around two million people under the new initiative.

CPEC and NAVTTC will also cooperate in accreditation & Certification Piloting of Apprenticeship Reforms Job Placement & Career Counseling National Vocational Qualification Framework (RPL & RCC) and strengthening Public Private Partnership to bridge demand & supply gap.

There is another feather in the cap of CPEC is to divert development influx in Gilgit-Baltistan in 2019 by announcing a women university, cancer and cardiac hospitals, a medical college and hydropower projects.

A 100MW hydropower project near Karakoram International University in Gilgit, an 80MW hydropower project in Phander area of Ghizer and other such projects in the region will help bridge energy gap in the poor region.

The writer is a senior journalist working for China Today and China Radio International. He also contributes to national mainstreams newspapers on economy, international relation and human rights. He is a fellow of ICFJ.

 yaseerkhan@hotmail.com

@yasirkhann