**CPEC is the future of both Pakistan and Balochistan**

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November 08, 2020

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is generally described as a game changer for Pakistan and Balochistan. But in my reckoning, CPEC is much more than that. In the long-term perspective, CPEC is the future of Balochistan in the same way as Balochistan is the future of Pakistan.

It is time the Pakistan government gave Balochistan the importance and attention it deserves. The province holds immense mineral and agricultural resources but its development has long been neglected by successive governments. Needless to say, a well-coordinated long-term development plan for the utilization of its natural resources will not only herald a new era of prosperity for Balochistan but also transform the economic future of Pakistan.

Balochistan has long been neglected. Especially, its rural hinterland and vast expanses of virgin land have remained starved of any organised effort for economic and social uplift. Water is scarce and means of livelihood limited for large segments of the population. Poverty is widespread and unemployment high among Baloch youth who live near the cities and can manage to get an education.

[Israel to build new settlement near Gaza](https://nation.com.pk/09-Nov-2020/israel-to-build-new-settlement-near-gaza)

CPEC has the potential to put Balochistan on the road to rapid development provided the province is treated as the fulcrum of this mega project. It has been rightly said that if CPEC is completed and sustained without the full inclusion of the local population or remains confined only to developed areas, it will cause resentment rather than become a source of satisfaction for the people. The bottom line is that the prime actors and benefactors of this project must be the people of Balochistan, or for that matter the people of Pakistan.

It may be recalled here that under the Nawaz Sharif government there were reports of corruption and a lack of transparency around CPEC projects. Many CPEC projects were implemented in the Punjab province—the epicentre of PML-N voters—instead of in Balochistan. There were complaints in the public domain about the effect that corruption was having on CPEC projects and their viability. In 2015, Daud Khan Achakzai, the then Senator from Balochistan, called CPEC “the China-Punjab Economic Corridor, because it will mainly benefit Punjab and not the other provinces.”

[Global coronavirus cases top 50 million](https://nation.com.pk/09-Nov-2020/global-coronavirus-cases-top-50-million)

In the past, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) has been critical of the way the PML-N government handled the CPEC. Now that PTI is in government, it must avoid the mistakes made by PML-N and take necessary steps to transform CPEC into a true vehicle of all-round development for both Pakistan and Balochistan. The province must get its full and fair share of the infrastructure, energy and other projects being implemented under CPEC.

As a starting point, the PTI government must take notice of reports that the implementation of CPEC projects in Balochistan and elsewhere in the country have slowed down over the last couple of years. Earlier on, there have also been talks of re-evaluating and renegotiating the CPEC projects. But the Imran Khan government has since taken steps to assuage China’s concerns. After Khan’s third visit to China, he brought former Finance Minister Asad Umar—who has previously defended CPEC—back into his cabinet as the Minister for Planning and Development. Clearly, he was brought back to improve the implementation of CPEC and address Chinese reservations.

[Can’t shake hands with those who bring country into trouble: Ali Muhammad](https://nation.com.pk/08-Nov-2020/can-t-shake-hands-with-those-who-bring-the-country-into-trouble-ali-muhammad)

The PTI government must move quickly to address the concerns of Balochistan regarding the progress of CPEC projects. The provincial government of Chief Minister of Balochistan Jam Kamal Khan, despite being the ally of the ruling PTI government, has complained about Balochistan not being given its “due share” in the CPEC projects.

For full flowering of the CPEC projects, peace is the basic need of Balochistan. No doubt, in recent years steps have been taken to reduce the level of insecurity and disaffection in the province, but much more still remains to be done in this behalf. The best way for the present government to win the hearts and minds of the people of Balochistan is to prove by concrete action that it cares for them. And this it can do by bringing the fruits of development to their doorsteps by speedy completion of CPEC projects. More road networks, power plants, industrial projects, employment centres, educational institutes and hospitals to meet the needs of the common people can be the best answer to the propaganda of hostile forces.

[PM Imran Khan presents real concept of state of Madinah: Speaker NA](https://nation.com.pk/08-Nov-2020/pm-imran-khan-presents-real-concept-of-state-of-madinah-speaker-na)

There is surely a need for a new narrative of stability and peace in Balochistan. The notion of peace can be best nurtured through confidence building measures and adopting an inclusive approach to solve problems facing the province. The people of Balochistan should be given a sense of ownership by making their elected representatives active partners in a new grand architecture of development for the province under the umbrella of CPEC.