**Decade of success**

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Friday, Aug 04, 2023

I had the honour of participating at the special ceremony held in Islamabad on the completion of ten years of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). On the occasion, Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Federal Minister for Planning Professor Ahsan Iqbal, other members of the cabinet, senior officials of various ministries and heads of commercial organizations were present. Vice Premier of China He Lifeng also graced the ceremony as the chief guest.

During the 10th anniversary celebrations, the two countries signed six MoUs to further strengthen economic relations and bilateral ties. The top leadership of both the countries also reviewed the completion, progress and future plans of various initiatives under the said project in the last one decade and discussed further mutual cooperation.

Interestingly, when the CPEC was launched in 2013, the same political leadership was in power in China and Pakistan, which is still committed today. If the then prime minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif decided to join hands with China at the time, today his brother Mian Shahbaz Sharif as the prime minister is celebrating the ten-year anniversary of this great project of the 21st century and our dynamic Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is defending Pakistan's case on every diplomatic front. Similarly, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal has got this unique honour in our national history that ten years ago he launched the CPEC with great hopes and now he is celebrating the decade of success with the same dedication, passion and enthusiasm.

Undoubtedly, ten years ago, when the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project was launched after the visit of the Chinese president to Pakistan, our country was going through the most critical moment in our national history. I remember that border tension with some neighbouring countries was on the rise, every citizen from Karachi to Quetta was suffering from unrest and fear. Due to uncertainty, no country was interested to invest even a single penny in Pakistan. In such a situation, China came forward to collaborate with us for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which proved to be a ray of hope. Under the CPEC, an investment of $25 billion was made possible in the first phase, which itself is a record in our national history.

However, a series of international conspiracies had also started to sabotage the CPEC project, which was also mentioned by the then PM Mian Nawaz Sharif while talking to journalists during his visit to Turkey. In this regard, I wrote my weekly column entitled 'Western conspiracies against CPEC?’ published in February 2017, predicting that the CPEC, despite all internal hurdles and foreign conspiracies, would open a bright chapter of development and prosperity for Pakistan, China and the billions of people living in the region. From the defence point of view, I still have the same stance that just as the nuclear tests in 1998 made the country's defense invincible, the CPEC project is pivotal for economic security.

On the completion of ten years of CPEC, I would also like to pay tribute to the first elected prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Shaheed, who laid the foundation of Pakistan-China friendship. Due to his visionary leadership, not only did we succeed in having a reliable long-term friend at the diplomatic level, but China's relations with the modern world were also established, which the Chinese people still acknowledge today.

In my view, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's advice to India to give up its opposition to CPEC and benefit from its positive outcomes is very timely and realistic. During the last 76 years, people from both sides have suffered badly. I am quite hopeful that in the next phase of the CPEC project, bilateral cooperation would be expanded in the best interest of the people of Pakistan, China and the region.

The writer is a member of the

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