**Ten years of CPEC**

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July 2023 marked the completion of 10 years since the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was launched. The project was initiated with full commitment to see it through. Both the countries radiated sincerity for the achievement of this mega project. With its sinking economy, debt repayment incapacity and excessive dependence on dollars for trade to protect its forex reserves, Pakistan was in dire need to have such a miracle.
The passage of 10 years affords both countries an opportunity to take stock of what they have achieved so far and calibrate the way forward to evade any further roadblocks. The idealist approach in this regard entails the fact that the project aimed at creating 100,000 job opportunities for Pakistani`s, with 6000 MWs of electricity, 800km long transmission lines, and over 510km of roads creating rural-urban synergy and regional connectivity.
Significant, too, is to discuss the fact the need to develop Pakistan’s Blue Economy through the Gwadar port and its connectivity with the hinterland through the western route and the rest of the world via upcoming Gwadar Airport. The airport, being built with a Chinese grant of $230 million, will be accomplished this year. The project also helped develop infrastructure—to the tune of $1.2 billion—destroyed due to NATO supply.
Before the CPEC, the plan for the development of such infrastructure lay in tatters, due to the insufficient wherewithal. As important as other sectors are, so too energy. Chinese companies in harness with Pakistani institutions launched a series of energy projects. It is significant to note Sahiwal Coal Power, Karot Hydropower Port Qasim, HUBO have fallen completely.
The recent visit of the Chinese vice premier is of great significance. The bilateral resolve to expedite the mosaic of development was taken to new heights. At the advent of Lifeng`s visit, six more agreements were signed pursuing the commitment to meet the desired goal.
From a realist perspective, CPEC can be seen as a strategic manoeuvre by China to secure its economic and geopolitical interests. China, being an emerging global power, aims to establish a stronger foothold in the region by investing in Pakistan`s infrastructure and creating trade routes that benefit its economy. However, over time, the vigour of state institutions to keep the project reproachful withered. The bureaucratic politicking coupled with the negligent attitude of institutions contributed substantially to stunting its progress. For there was no-chain of command in place, a tug-of-war among ministries and departments soared to extremes. Buck-passing, being our national ethos, affected the project badly; however, the fact that it is played with such dexterity makes it difficult for anyone to question.
On the heels of domestic issues come the element of global politics hobbling CPEC. With many efforts to contain China afoot, efforts to subvert the CPEC are among them. Behind the intentions to sabotage the CPEC, lies Pakistan`s puffing of the prospective dividends of CPEC that stoked caution in the anti-Pakistan lobbies in the West. It is reported that Chinese authorities advised those of Pakistani origin to maintain a balanced approach in the wake of runaway global envy. The whole game revolves around outdoing each other. The analysis of the past unfurls west`s caginess about the advantageousness of Balochistan. Russian urge to access warm waters was followed by invasion of Afghanistan. And, the west sponsored the whole fight in pursuance of its motive to check Russian access to warm waters. However, the present scenario too draws the same picture as that of the past.
For CPEC is the potential staple of regional economic strength, the chances to put western clout—through its monetary bodies—on the backburners have arisen. CPEC cannot only connect the region but it can also be connected with the Middle East, Africa, and Europe through the Red sea and Suez Canal. In view of this much global envy, deepening political maelstrom in Pakistan is little wonder.
On the one hand, Indian hegemonic intentions are palpable and the other hand reveals Chinese clout in the region, well enough to restrict India within its ambit. Another is the worsening security situation in the country. Ever since the country adopted a disastrous appeasement policy, the menace of terrorism is on its heels. Following the appeasement policy, Balochistan is under constant attack. Occurrences of terrorist attacks follow the passage of each day. The Zhob Garrison attack is the latest in a string of terrorist outrages that occurred since non-holds-barred entry was given to the militants. While Pakistan is making efforts to rein terrorism, there are some factors countering its efforts for peace-making.
After the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, all the militant groups have been enjoying unrestricted movement and operation since then. So much so that the 32nd report of UN`s analytical support and sanctions monitoring team has signified lax control of Afghan Taliban and emerging status of TTP therein. Amid this exacerbating condition, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are at lowest ebb. The need at the time is to make a business-friendly environment in tandem with improving security. The other fronts unleashing difficulties are tense relations with Afghanistan coupled with entrenched Indian involvement in Afghanistan. To obviate this issue demands, devise a policy based on relations with Afghans on even standings rather than prioritising brotherhood in the maintenance of relations.