**Vision to reality**

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In a recent celebration, Pakistan marked the 10-year milestone of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This game-changing initiative has paved the way for extensive infrastructural development, economic growth, and strengthened bilateral ties between the two nations. Under PPP’s visionary leadership, Pakistan’s relationship with China reached new heights, setting the stage for the success of CPEC. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and shifts in political leadership, CPEC’s potential remains significant, demanding a united effort from all stakeholders to realize its full impact.
As we witness China’s investments in Pakistan materialise through CPEC, it is evident that a significant part of its success can be attributed to the groundwork and foundation laid by the PPP government. Under President Zardari’s leadership, inspired by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s visionary goals of aligning with the Chinese Communist Party, and championed by PM Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan’s relationship with China has transcended to new dimensions.
For the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), CPEC was more than just a project to build roads and railways; it symbolised a shared vision of cooperation and economic growth between Pakistan and China. President Asif Ali Zardari’s eleven visits to China showcased the government’s commitment to fostering strong ties with China. His grand idea of pivoting East at a time when the world was still focused on other capitals laid the foundation for the transformative CPEC project.
PPP played a pivotal role in establishing a strong political consensus regarding the importance of Pakistan’s ties with China. This included a historic decision to grant Beijing entry to the Gwadar Port, fostering a broader vision of economic interdependence between the two nations. Through their leadership, PPP ensured the alignment of political forces in recognising the significance of the China-Pakistan relationship, paving the way for transformative initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The PPP comprehended the grand Chinese vision effectively, recognising the significance of granting state support and strategic access to our warm waters.
Today, the completion of Phase one of the Gwadar Free Trade Zone and the development of the Gwadar Port stand as testament to CPEC’s achievements. With $25 billion in investments and the creation of 200,000 job opportunities, CPEC has already demonstrated its potential as a significant driver of economic development in Pakistan.
The PPP government in Sindh played a crucial role in facilitating CPEC projects by collaborating closely with Chinese officials and investors. Cultural exchanges, people-to-people relationships, and ensuring the security of those involved in CPEC were also high on their agenda. Thar Coal, as CPEC’s first major energy project, played a pivotal role in providing power to the national grid.
The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruptions to various projects, including those under CPEC. However, it was during Imran Khan’s PTI government that CPEC projects faced significant challenges, with talks of reviewing the project’s merits and potential halts. In contrast, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari consistently advocated for the smooth functioning of CPEC, emphasising its significance in Pakistan’s national interest and its ties with China.
The key to success for CPEC lies in national unity. The country must be on the same page, recognising the greater good that CPEC can bring to Pakistan. Despite political differences, all provinces must work together to harness the full potential of this transformative initiative.
As CPEC enters its second phase, it promises to create an engine of innovation and ingenuity, not just for Pakistan and China, but for the entire region. This cooperation and exchange of ideas will drive the pursuit of peace in a world plagued by inequalities, conflicts, and social disorder.
Undoubtedly, CPEC’s infrastructure and investment pipeline hold immense potential to bring prosperity and peace to Pakistan, propelling the country into a new era of growth. Chinese investment is projected to stimulate a remarkable 15% increase in Pakistan’s GDP by 2030 and create over a million job opportunities across diverse sectors. However, our focus must not be solely on infrastructure and economic growth. It is crucial to prioritise technological knowledge sharing and collaborations as well. Exploring regional value chains presents an exciting opportunity for Pakistan, as it can benefit from advanced manufacturing and production practices through CPEC.