**CPEC Puzzle**

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From the very first day PTI declared [CPEC](https://dailytimes.com.pk/532651/foreign-speculations-of-cpec-daily-times/) a top priority. Prime Minister himself, at different occasions pinned the importance of CPEC. He assured all stakeholders including Chinese counterparts that his government will do everything to smoothen the process of implementation. Prime Minister established CPEC Authority and speed up the process for joint coordination meeting. Joint Coordination meeting was held with much pump and show. It was sold as all will be well after the meeting. CPEC will start to run at electric speed. Unfortunately, after two months of meeting, things are not moving with required speed. Regrettably,progress is very slow. Government is still struggling to find a sustainable solution.

Despite improvement of “Ease of Doing Business” ranking, business environment is not conducive for investment. Government’s rhetoric of facilitation for business community could not translate into action. There is a much oratory but very limited actual work. There are multiple factors which are acting as bottleneck. For example, time management is one of the worse areas of governance. Corruption is still out of control. Government is trying to work on these areas, but results are not complimenting efforts of government. Inefficiency is most prominent feature of overall governance structure.

The cost of inefficiencies is very high. It is shattering the confidence of investors and business community. Investors are hesitant to bring new investment under CPEC. It is clear from the slow rate of actualization of promised investments. During the last one year many delegations from different countries visited Pakistan. Government of China put special efforts to convince her business community to invest in Pakistan. Business community also showed keen interest in investment, but lack of infrastructure and facilitation hinder to invest.

The major causality is industrial development. As it was envisioned that second phase of CPEC will lay down the foundation of industrial development in Pakistan. Special Economic Zones were identified as vehicle of industrialization by providing state of art facilities and services for local and international investors. Unfortunately, after six years of CPEC, country is still without any functional SEZ. Now government is trying to speed up the process, but it is not according to requirement and demand of business community and investors.

Another cost is criticism and malicious campaigns run by different interest groups, at national, regional and international levels. CPEC has become punching bag for everyone. Criticism starts from home. We can find many people in Pakistan who question the speed of work CPEC. Western countries, India and USA are other players which show deep concern on CPEC. These countries, every other day come up with some allegations. Story startedwith debt trap and goes on to environment, social development and strategic interests. The most recent recruit on this front is corruption. Recent talk by Ms. Alice Wells was full of criticism for CPEC, China and Chinese companies. Most recently, CPEC authority has been criticized by USA government on the basis of corruption. Although there is no proof or example of corruption, but non-functioning of Authority is giving space to opponents.

The situation urges government to redefine and restructure its efforts. Government will have to look into how it can innovate to resolve the issues. The good news is that government has taken two very good steps. First, government has appointed Asad Umar as Minister of Federal Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms (MoPD&R). He is good choice to look at the pressing issues of development planning, execution and suggest some steps to solve the issues. Being focal ministry for CPEC it is expected that Asad Umar willbring a new vigor to facilitate the smooth planning and implementation of CPEC.

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Second, CPEC Authority is a good and innovate idea to give push to CPEC. Authority has been created to facilitate implementation of CPEC and remove bottlenecks which hinders the smooth implementation.

However, it would be challenging for authority to devise a comprehensive plan for fulfilling its perceived roles and responsibilities. First task would be to devise tools for interaction with existing stakeholders. As, authority will have to interact with numerous departments, organizations and ministries. Every ministry has a different job description and instruments to implement the respective policies and plans. Another important area of consideration for authority would be how it develop tools to interact with China. China’s models of development, implementation and governance are entirely different from Pakistan.

Hence, authority will require a complete set of skills to understand and facilitate the work of each and every ministry and China. It will not be simple matter of management, it goes beyond management. Hence, it would be pertinent to suggest here that authority must have persons who have multi-dimensional skills and deep understanding of political economy of Pakistan and China. Moreover, it will have to be observed how MoPD&R will build working partnership with authority.

Despite these two important actions, situation is still complicated and confusing. Rumors and confusion are surrounding the CPEC. Interest groups are trying to influence common citizens and trying to create bad blood between Pakistan and China. These all rumors and speculations are in market because government is struggling to implement a sustainable strategy/solution. There is no second opinion is that government is fighting at multiple fronts e.g. FATF, economic crises, regional situation and international opposition etc. but government will have to counter rumors and confusion. Rumors and confusion are impacting CPEC very badly.Thus, Government must have to take immediate steps to dispel this confusion and counter the speculation business. The sensible strategy would be to implement the decision of joint committee meeting and fully functional the authority with clear vision and job description. Authority should immediately take over its job and start to mitigate the confusion and rumor by actions.

Second, Pakistan should stop wasting time in un-necessary activities and meaningless discussion with Chinese counterparts. For, example we waste much of our time on two points; first we tell Chinese counterparts, how China moved on development ladder. A quick analysis of recent meetings, consultations and seminars can highlight the spectrum of problem. We need to understand that Chinese knows better than us how they developed. What sacrifices they made. Second, our preferred area of discussion is how deep friendship China and Pakistan are enjoying. Again, it is understood and well documented that we are iron brother, so we need to move forward. These useless activities undermine the real areas of discussion like SEZ development, trade, financial integration etc. There is need to focus on business, business proposal and practical actions.

Lastly, we need to learn that oratory cannot deliver results. For results real actions are needed. Therefore, it would be wise if we can learn to speak less and move our hands at greater speed.

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