**The Abject Failure of China Visit**

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If you go by the government’s spin doctors, you’d be forgiven for believing that the prime minister accomplished some sort of miracle during his four-day visit to China, while the fact is that despite all the boasts and raised expectations, all that was achieved was a few photo-ops and nothing more: no tangible programs, no quantifiable deals, and definitely, not the $3 billion in fresh loans that were sought. Of course, the Chinese would talk positively about state-to-state relations, especially CPEC, during and after formal meetings, but that doesn’t wash away the reality that they have been unhappy enough with the pace of the project and, especially, security arrangements for their workers to slow the whole thing down.

The PM and his media warriors have also conveniently forgotten, and also wish for the people to just as conveniently forget, that the CPEC was initiated in the time of the previous government, the PML-N setup that they blame for everything that has gone wrong since PTI came to power but was alright before it. And it was the present ruling party, then in opposition, that did what it could to block the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Islamabad to make the historic announcement because it thought that its so-called dharna was more important for the country.

As the PTI gains experience in government, it will also understand that when you are reduced to using hype to turn non-achievements into achievements, things are actually slipping through your fingers and you’re unable to do anything to turn the tide where it matters. They tried to keep a lid on chatter before the visit, but everybody already knew that they were looking to use meetings in Beijing to remove China’s doubts about Pakistan’s commitment to CPEC. But once they got there, it became apparent that the only reason for the invitation, other than historic Pak-China ties, was our neighbour’s own requirement to invite as many heads of state as possible to blunt the US-led western boycott of the winter Olympics.

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Somebody was also left with considerable egg on his face when he tweeted that PM Imran Khan was about to become the first head of state to meet the Chinese president in about two years. He, and the ruling party as well as their diminishing number of supporters, would have been spared some embarrassment if only he had checked the news because by then, President Xi was already in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Both have bigger fish to fry because the might of the US financial and military behemoth is aimed at them at the moment. Russia has invited western fury by drawing lines around Ukraine, forbidding nato’s expansion into former Soviet client states. And China is in Washington’s crosshairs because its growing economic standing threatens to overshadow the US economy sooner rather than later. It was, therefore, a strategic and political masterstroke for Presidents Putin and Jinping to leverage the Olympics to make a unified stand against a superpower bent upon throwing its weight around.

For the Pakistani prime minister to consider himself a part of this plan as far bigger pieces were being moved across the international political chessboard amounts, quite simply, to want to punch above his weight. But that didn’t stop him or his team from still taking to social media and trying to show as if they were the center of all attention during those few days.

The Chinse are very serious about whatever they do on the international stage and how they do it, and this rather strange maneuvering on the part of its old friend Pakistan to try to steal the limelight would not have gone unnoticed. And it won’t do the country much good if they add this to the long list of things that have made them unhappy with this government over the last three years or so.

What this government really very badly needs is a reality check, and it seems very upset that the people of Pakistan seem to have had theirs. Why else would the PM announce things like a pre-poll roadshow? Giving acts of desperation fancy names just because they are having to bend over backward to avoid a repeat of what happened in the first phase of the KP local body polls in the second round as well only smacks of opportunism typical of this party, and it will not work with the people anymore.

The PTI is welcome to live in its own fool’s paradise for as long as it wishes. But it shouldn’t insult the people by expecting them to continue living there as well.

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