**The strongest of ties**

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The Communist Party of China deserves credit for not only changing its approach according to the needs and demands of the changing times, but also aligning the thinking of its people with the new realities. Due to the foresight of the Chinese leadership, China not only successfully resisted US-led western conspiracies but also did not fall into the traps of the capitalist economy. Instead, the country set new examples of rapid growth and even put the Western economies on a backfoot.

China has now become a global power and thankfully – unlike the United States and Great Britain – the Chinese adopted a policy of connectivity, cooperation, free trade, financial integration and people-to-people connections. The Chinese government incorporated this policy in its game-changing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Under the BRI, China is building six economic corridors of connectivity from South and Central Asia to Europe and from the Far East to Africa. The network connects more than 150 countries. Thus, the BRI is not a regional project but a global initiative that has also become strategic along with the economic agenda. The US along with the G7 countries launched the billions-dollar project called Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) to undermine the BRI.

It is fortunate that China is not only a trusted friend of Pakistan but that its flagship project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the BRI has come under Pakistan share. The Chinese leadership and public should keep in mind that Pakistan, being a weak and developing country, is bearing the brunt of the anti-BRI countries due to Islamabad’s close ties with Beijing and the CPEC project.

Pressure on Pakistan from the US and other Western countries, including the strict conditions of the IMF, are some examples of how efforts are being made to force Pakistan away from CPEC. The country has become the primary target of the West’s contain-China policy. In fact, Pakistan has been sandwiched between the Western world and China. In this symbiotic relationship between Pakistan and China, it is expected that China will also not let Pakistan weaken since that would also end up weakening CPEC and the BRI.

Under CPEC, a lot of work has been done in Pakistan regarding infrastructure and more is being done, but if an industrial base is not created and exports are not made in the same proportion, then this infrastructure can become a burden for Pakistan. Thus, China should help Pakistan strengthen its industrial base and increase its exports. One of the main objectives of the BRI is free trade. Due to lack of industrial base, Pakistan is facing the challenge of trade imbalance.

Currently, if Pakistan’s exports to China is one billion dollars, our import from China is fifteen to sixteen billion dollars. Due to this imbalance, local industries cannot develop in Pakistan due to the cheap goods coming from China. Moreover, dollars are also flowing out of Pakistan. Therefore, it is expected that China can give special trade privileges like Europe’s GST Plus or America’s Increased Market Access to get Pakistan out of this crisis. If China reduces the duty on Pakistani exports, local industries will get a chance to flourish and we will not be dependent on Western powers due to the dollar crisis in Pakistan. Otherwise, due to lack of industrial development and reduced exports, the infrastructure installed under CPEC will become a problem.

In this context, I would request that there should be an industrial development plan for Pakistan under the CPEC. Similarly, China is importing a lot for its great army. Though in terms of technology and weapons China is far ahead of Pakistan, there are probably a number of small items that can be imported from Pakistan.

In the end, I would like to give some humble advice to my Chinese friends: since the BRI has now spread over more than 150 countries of the world and has great strategic and economic importance, the Chinese leadership should launch a global narrative for its global outreach. One of the main reasons for the success of America and Europe is that they spend a lot of money on media and propaganda and they are also champions in this field. However, China is far behind them in this field.

In order to convey its narrative to the world, China must pay special attention to this and shift a part of the capital being spent on the BRI to this direction. We are seeing that American and British TV channels are also broadcasting in Arabic and Turkish and their sources of propaganda on social media are also much higher than in China. China lags in the field of print, electronic media and social media. It cannot convey its narrative clearly to its rival, even its allies. China needs to invest heavily in this field to compete with the US and others.

(The above views were expressed in a conference of political leaders and experts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, organized by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the city of Kunming. Pakistan was represented by Mushahid Hussain Syed, Ahsan Iqbal, Adul Shahzeb and the writer.)

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