

Sino-Pak relations

Imdad Hussain
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Exchange of professionals essential for strong relationships

People-to-people contact means interaction between citizens of two countries at different levels but without interference and guidance of the government or the state-run institutions, directly or indirectly. For such a contact, a state's role is over after facilitating people (in two-way interactions) to obtain proper travel documents. With understanding, all people involved in these interactive sessions have responsibility to shape up ideas and create new thoughts to further improve relationship between masses on both the sides. Such contacts could be through professional bodies and – in some cases – some government institutions also facilitate groups of professionals visiting either state to shape up new ideas and create more space for good interaction on the two sides.

In the context of Pakistan-China relations, the people-to-people contacts are not only increasing, especially recently but also these interactions are attaining new heights on the level of the already established government-to-government ties. It is now a reality that the friendship between Pakistan and China has a glorious past and a bright future due to mutual trust on both sides of the friendly border. This friendship between the two trusted neighbours would continue to act as a stabilising force for the entire region, as Pakistan is strategically situated at the intersection of South, West and Central Asia. Every Pakistani has confidence that relations between the two all-weather friends would continue to flourish as the Pak-China friendship enjoys public support in both the countries.

In Islamabad, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China is also playing an active role in providing strength to the people-to-people relationships and increasing contacts between the institutions, especially educational and most importantly media that is playing a key role in building trust and boosting confidence among public. In 2014, the Chinese government through its embassy in Islamabad planned to increase interactions between the media houses as well as journalists between the two neighbours so that the real situation can be shared with the people. A five-member media delegation received a nine-month professional training as well as knowhow about the Chinese social and cultural life during a newly-launched Journalists Exchange Programme by the Chinese government. We all had a chance to live in Beijing besides visiting Shanghai and some other cities, including different attractive places of Jilin and Sichuan provinces.

Besides learning, we had a chance to observe Chinese society from close and their traditions and cultural values and secrets behind their success. And continuous hard work and honesty as well as true nationalism are the secrets behind their success. They have established a very good, technology based education system not only for foreigners but also for their own nationals. When you visit China, one thing is very clear: if you are a foreigner, you get a respect in their society and if you are from Pakistan, then just enjoy your life as you are in your homeland with full respect and affection of the Chinese people who are more friendly towards Pakistanis. The love, care and affection you receive in China can be gauged from the fact that if a Chinese national knows that you are from Pakistan, he or she will try to speak to you, and will make signs with their hands that the Pakistanis and the Chinese are iron brothers – a very common term used in Pakistan for this friendship.

During our stay in China, we also had a chance to visit different media houses including the state-run China Radio International (CRI), *China Daily*, *Global Times* and one of the largest TV channels of the giant nation as well as visiting different top-ranking universities of the great Asian nation. Their media is also very responsible in handling all issues, especially critical situations and disseminating information at public level. All journalists are fully trained in their specific fields so that they report and write with full responsibility. Like in other parts of the world, in China too, corruption cases against high profile officials are also reported with full liberty but keeping all ethical limits in consideration. Tolerance is also the hallmark of Chinese people and we (Pakistanis) should learn the trick from them.

In China, there is good opinion about the US\$ 46 billion worth China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a national project spanning over 15 years (2015-2030). This mega project would be a guarantor of the future progress, prosperity and the unity of the whole region. This project would ensure that the less developed provinces like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would benefit from the fruits of this progress starting with immediate construction of the western route through these provinces to link Gwadar and Kashgar through a modern network of road communications.

There are signs that the region where Pakistan is located is finally settling down 36 years after the momentous events of 1979 – changes in Iran and the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. This is clear that the destabilisation of the region led to Pakistan getting caught up in the last big battle of the 20th century, the Afghan war, which ended the Cold War and led to the breakup of the Soviet Union, as well as being a frontline state in the war against terrorism after 9/11. The CPEC is an indicator of strengthening of Pakistan's position in the region. This initiative is the biggest and long-term national project which will protect and promote Pakistan's economic security, unite the federation through progress and prosperity of all the provinces, particularly the underdeveloped regions. However, this progress demands top priority to be given to education, research and development in Pakistan.

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