

Misleading public about CPEC

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The project is beneficial for everyone

Notwithstanding the fact that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a nationally owned mega development initiative regarded as a game changer for Pakistan and the region and an epitome of an eternal friendship and strategic partnership between the two countries, there have attempts by some political elements to politicise it like the Kalabagh Dam. The ANP started a route change controversy in complete disregard to the agreements and the modalities agreed between the two countries in regards to the implementation of CPEC and the decision making process in respect of determining the alignment and the areas through which the network of roads under the CPEC had to pass. The controversy also had parochial overtones.

Now the PTI is attempting to generate a new controversy over the prioritisation of the construction of the eastern route of the corridor which traverses through Punjab and Sindh. Last week, addressing a public rally in Swabi, Imran Khan lashed out at the government for deciding to go for the eastern route first and said that the step would deprive Balochistan and KP of the benefits of CPEC. The KP government has gone a step further by announcing to launch an agitation against this move and withdraw its cooperation to the federal government in regards to the implementation of CPEC as well as to obstruct the process of land acquisition for the corridor. This move by PTI ostensibly is rooted in its unrelenting cynicism to tarnish the image of the federal government rather than based on rational thinking and ground realities with respect to the CPEC and the projects related to it.

First of all, it is worth pointing out that the CPEC is a network of roads comprising three routes that will pass through all the four provinces that would ultimately share the benefits of this venture which has a timeline of 2030 for its completion. Contrary to the claims of PTI, Balochistan and KP would be the biggest beneficiaries of this collaborative effort between China and Pakistan. It would perhaps be pertinent to narrate some of the facts regarding the implementation of the CPEC to unravel the truth. Gwadar port in Balochistan has been completed and work on the construction of an international airport is already in progress.

The management of Gwadar port has been handed over to the Chinese. The priority given to the eastern route is logical from the perspective of economic and feasibility imperatives. Punjab and Sindh have an extensive network of roads and railways and other infrastructure that can act as a catalyst in the early construction of the route and make it productive in the shortest span of time. The decision to go ahead with this route has been made on the desire of Chinese partners and the recommendations of the working groups formed by the two countries keeping in view the technical aspects in conformity with the agreed mechanism of giving priority to the early harvest projects.

However, it is wrong to say that the government is only working on the eastern route. Work on western route which starting from Gwadar would wind its way through Balochistan, KP and Gilgit-Baltistan to Kashghar, is well underway. The Frontier Works Organisation has already constructed 870km segment of the western route in Balochistan linking Tallar, Turbat and Hushab. The members of the parliamentary

committee on CPEC visited this segment of the western route on 29th November. Chairman of the committee Mushahid Hussain Syed, while talking to the media, said that the CPEC had become a vital factor in uniting the federation of Pakistan with a focus on progress and prosperity of the smaller provinces, particularly Balochistan and KP. He said the CPEC was a national project and did not belong to any political party, individual and one particular province that would change the fate of the entire country.

The foregoing facts and observations of Mushahid Hussain are good enough to prove that the PTI was trying to mislead the public about the ground realities pertaining to the implementation of CPEC and its overall likely impact on the economic profile of Pakistan and its federating units. Trying to politicise the issue is actually tantamount to sabotaging national interests and jeopardising the exponential leap in the economic ties between China and Pakistan. Intellectual circles and political analyst are of the considered view that after having failed to dislodge the federal government through its unconstitutional antics, having faced reverses on its rigging mantra at different forums and failing to improve governance in KP, the PTI was now trying to divert the attention of the public by fomenting a controversy on CPEC.

The politics of PTI during the last two and half years, regrettably, has revolved around denigrating state institutions and the PML-N government. Imran Khan has introduced a culture of violence and lawlessness in the body politics of the country. His obsession with this phenomenon has actually harmed Pakistan to a great extent. His 'dharna' politics cost the country an estimated loss of Rs500 billion. The rupee fell to a six-month low against the dollar leading to an unexpected rise in the public debt to the tune of Rs350 billion. Not only that the cancellation of the visit of Chinese President to Pakistan, who was coming to sign agreements for Chinese investment in Pakistan, was the biggest diplomatic embarrassment for the country. It also delayed the initiation of work on the power projects to be funded with the Chinese assistance and support.

Imran Khan and his party are better advised to set their own house in order, improve governance in KP in which they have miserably failed. The people have mandated the PTI to play its role in strengthening democracy and to nudge the process of improvement in governance in collaboration with other political entities sitting in the Parliament and not indulging in street politics and harming democracy. PTI's long absence from the Parliament and the disdain that Imran has repeatedly shown for this august forum is tantamount to betrayal of people's mandate. The PTI must avoid politicking on the CPEC and focus more on the internal issues that demand collective and collaborative effort on the part of all the political entities and stakeholders in the future of Pakistan. Needless to emphasise that the country is faced with formidable challenges which can only be tackled through impregnable unity and adoption of national outlook by our politicians, taking leave from politics of self-aggrandisement.

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