

KP's reservations on CPEC

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Let us not squander this opportunity

Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pervez Khattak has expressed serious reservations regarding China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and warned the federal government that if it did not address the fears of KP about the (CPEC) project, then the province would take an extreme step. The harsh statement was rendered in the presence of Senator Mushahid Hussain during a news conference after Mr Mushahid, who heads a parliamentary committee overseeing the CPEC project, briefed the parliamentary party leaders at Peshawar.

To allay KP's reservations, a four-member committee has been constituted to ensure liaison with the federal government and monitor execution of the CPEC in order to resolve differences.

The outburst from the KP Chief Minister is serious since the CPEC is a national project which is likely to usher major economic developments in Pakistan. Earlier, too, some politicians had raised objections regarding the priorities in the execution of the project. Following the epoch making visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Pakistan in April 2015, an All Parties Conference (APC) was convened by the government on May 28 during which the Federal Minister for Planning Development and Reform Mr Ahsan Iqbal briefed the participants to assuage doubts regarding the mega project. Resultantly, all political parties expressed full support for the project.

Examine Mr Khattak's qualms, prima facie, the minutes of the May 28, 2015, APC indicate the commitment to build the western route, passing through backward areas of KP and Balochistan on priority basis. Khattak claims that the western route has been restricted only to a road, which is unacceptable to KP, while the project's additional components including fiber optic, railway track, gas and oil pipeline, LNG and other facilities had been attached with the eastern route of the corridor to be laid between Gwadar and Rawalpindi.

Apparently, either the KP CM is not fully cognizant of the full magnitude of the project or he is being deliberately manoeuvred by vested interests to sabotage CPEC. The May 28 APC talks only of the western route but KP is the beneficiary of five major aspects of the project. A new KKH is being built because the old route is congested with traffic and is the worse for wear. More than 600 kms of the new KKH is going to pass through KP. The CM is demanding a six-lane highway, which is ambitious and it is impractical to construct such a broad highway through mountains and treacherous terrain, where a dual carriage road will suffice as is the norm in most developed countries. He also claims that if the CPEC's share for KP is only a road, the province could have built it from its own resources. What is stopping him?

The second project, the 840 MW Suki Kinari hydropower project is the largest private sector hydropower initiative in Pakistan. Designed to produce 2.958 GWh annually, this mega project alone is expected to substantially increase Pakistan's existing available power generation capacity. Its groundwork is expected to commence in March 2016.

Feasibility study of laying a modern Peshawar to Karachi railway network has been carried out. The previous railway network, belonging to the colonial era, is in a dilapidated state. The new network project will be completed in two to three stages.

Havelian dry port facility feasibility study is complete and the conclusion of this project by 2017 will provide tremendous revenue generating opportunities to the KP province. The fifth project that will propel the information capacity of KP and Pakistan is the installation of the optical fiber link from Khunjerab to Islamabad via the KKH. The project comprises the deployment of 820 km on the KKH in phase I, and conversion into ring protection by deploying another 1,000 km optical fiber cable on alternate route and in phase III extension till Gwadar port. Special Communication Organisation, the executing agency has awarded this contract to Huawei China to implement in two-year time. The climatic conditions warrant initiation of project from Sust to Khunjerab section on top priority due to a very limited time period left available during the summer time. However, other than this section, the project will be executed simultaneously in different sections. With this new link, Pakistan is going to enjoy the redundant internet voice and data connectivity through China, which currently gets severed with spurs through undersea cables.

KP being a direct beneficiary of five of the thirty projects and indirectly accruing benefits from the rest is a remarkable advantage, which will not only enhance the communication capacity but provide greater opportunities for employment, trade and commerce. Unfortunately, politicians in this part of the world either seek kickbacks or political mileage if the projects see fruition during their tenure. Pervez Khattak, an honourable person, must be seeking only the latter; he will get plenty of photo opportunities to build his party's image.

The task of the CM KP is cut out; he must concentrate on improving the security environment in his terror struck province so that investors besides Pakistan's iron brother China are also attracted to KP as a lucrative investment opportunity.

The Chinese, who are braving the terror attacks, reside in makeshift camps away from their families expending their sweat and toil for the uplift of KP's inhabitants, should be welcomed openheartedly in Pashtun tradition, offering them comfort and encouragement rather than threatening them with extreme measures. After the December 16, 2014, heinous attack on APS, China extended moral and monetary support besides inviting a number of surviving students to visit China to help them overcome the trauma of the carnage. Chinese government has presented 800 million RMBs for the rehabilitation of the residents of FATA while generous donations have been remitted for the affectees of the recent earthquake. KP parliamentarians were invited to participate in the 60th anniversary celebrations of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. It is time inter-province rivalry or PTI-PML-N distrust is put aside for the greater good of the nation. Mega projects like the CPEC come once in a life time. Let us not squander this opportunity.

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