

CPEC worries

Editorial

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The controversy and apprehensions regarding the implementation of CPEC projects refuse to die. The Chief Minister (CM) of Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KP) Pervez Khattak has been raising the issue of alleged lack of transparency and parity between the provinces for months now, and even after the beginning of construction on the western route, the fears and reservations being expressed by lawmakers of KP are as loud as ever. This time it is not just the government of KP but the entire political class of the province that has united due to concerns about CPEC. The major bone of contention is that the plans for the western route inaugurated by the Prime Minister (PM) recently allegedly greatly differ from what was agreed in the All Parties Conference (APC) last May. The political parties of KP are also concerned that the CPEC plans for the western route, as they currently stand, make it seem like a glorified highway as opposed to part of an economic corridor, which comes with special industrial zones and other economy boosting projects like railways, electricity, fibre optic cable and natural gas pipelines. To this effect, a provincial APC was convened by JUI-F where this perceived lack of infrastructure projects being clearly earmarked was declared unacceptable and a cause for boycott by the province of the project. The APC however recognised the importance of CPEC and its potential and simply urged the federal government to revert to the original plans as agreed upon with the consensus of all political stakeholders.

It is important to understand why these apprehensions are persisting and recognise the need to prevent this mistrust escalating into another Centre-provincial crisis. The fears being expressed by the politicians of KP are grounded in a long history of lopsided national development and indicate a problematic lack of transparency about the project as well as an enduring failure to communicate properly. It is for the best, however, to not ascribe ulterior or malicious motives to any of the parties concerned in this case. The provincial government has a right to raise its concerns and seek reassurances and it is incumbent on the federal government to treat these concerns with seriousness and respect. Rather than getting offended or feeling antagonised, the federal government should address these reservations promptly and rationally. The approach of the KP government, where it has been relying on emotional rhetoric is perhaps not the best strategy as it only fuels divisiveness. So in this light, the decision of the APC to send representatives to the PM in order to discuss their problems is a step in the right direction and will hopefully alleviate the breakdown in communication. The best possible outcome is if all the information gaps are filled and all four provinces are on board. For that to happen, it is necessary for the federal government to do its utmost to shed the perception that the CPEC is a province-biased project. *

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