

CPEC crack widens

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ISLAMABAD - A multi-party conference yesterday demanded Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif construct the western route of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor first, in line with the commitment he had made before political parties some seven months ago.

The all parties' conference or APC held on Sunday was convened by Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) and was attended by religious parties, nationalist forces, leftists and the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with all speakers unanimously denouncing the alteration in the original map of the corridor project.

In a resolution agreed by all, the APC called on the government to hand over the entire Gwadar Port Mega Project to Balochistan, besides asking it to ensure that western route of the corridor is completed on priority.

The multi-party gathering was attended by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief Minister Pervez Khattak, Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) head Fazlur Rehman, Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) chief Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) leader Mehmood Khan Achakzai, PPP senior leader Farhatullah Babar, Jamaat-e-Islami leader Liaqat Baloch and others.

PML-N leader and Leader of the House in Senate Raja Zafarul Haq, Senate Deputy Chairman and JUI-F leader Abdul Ghafoor Haidri, JUI-F's Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, PML-Q leader Mushahid Hussain, ANP stalwart Mian Iftikhar Ahmed and Hazara Democratic Party also participated in the event.

Despite that Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms Ahsan Iqbal assured the participants that smaller provinces will not be deprived of their economic benefits in the CPEC projects; political leaders expressed their doubts in government claims and assurances.

During the event a short but hot exchange of words was witnessed between Senator Jahanzeb Jamaldi and Minister Ahsan Iqbal when the former informed the leaders about the original map of the CPEC that was rejected by the federal minister.

The nationalist forces including PkMAP, National Party, ANP and others were of the opinion that the project will be unacceptable to the smaller provinces if the western route is built without its attached components including industrial zones, railway tracks, energy projects and fibre optic lines.

Mehmood Achakzai linked the successful execution of the multi-billion dollar investment project with the diplomatic relations of Pakistan with its neighbours, particularly India and Afghanistan, suggesting that Islamabad should be on same page with its neighbours to ensure security for the mega projects.

“Justice is prerequisite to implement the CPEC project. If you deny rights to smaller provinces then culture of gun will make inroads and it will be impossible to execute development schemes,” he said, adding injustice gives birth to hatred which becomes the main cause of conflicts leading to wars.

China on Saturday had requested that political forces in Pakistan must develop a consensus and forge unity in order to strengthen communication and coordination on the CPEC in order to create favourable conditions for the corridor.

A spokesman of the Chinese Embassy said, “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the consensus reached between China and Pakistan, and has won popular support from the two peoples. The CPEC faces Pakistan as a whole, and will bring development and benefits to the people of Pakistan.

“We hope that relevant parties could strengthen communication and coordination, solve differences properly, so as to create favourable conditions for the CPEC. We are ready to work with Pakistani side to actively promote construction of the CPEC projects, and bring tangible benefits to the peoples of the two countries.”

But the Sunday’s APC revealed that political players, particularly politicians in Balochistan and the KP, still have grave concerns over the way the CPEC has allegedly been altered in favour of Punjab.

Planning minister reiterated his assertion that no discrimination is meted out to any province in the corridor project arguing the CPEC was meant for the entire country.

Speaking on the occasion, he said energy projects worth 7.1 billion dollars will be completed in Balochistan province under CPEC, adding the amount was much bigger than the money spent in Punjab.

He maintained that said 35 out of total 46 billion dollars investment project were being spent on energy projects in IPP mode to produce about 17,000 megawatt of electricity, adding the electricity will be consumed by the entire country.

Chief of JUI-F, a partner in the federal government, suggested convening of another APC by the prime minister to allay the concerns of provinces and political parties. Fazlur Rehman said he was upset that the APC summoned on May 28 last year (for fighting menace of terrorism) could not produce the desired results.

In a direct reference to Minister Ahsan Iqbal, the JUI-F chief said the constitution clearly granted equal rights to provinces and regretted that raising voice for the constitutional demands of provinces was not entrained by the central government.

However, Senator Raja Zafarul Haq said that a delegation headed by BNP-M chief Akhtar Mengal will meet the PM soon to evolve consensus on CPEC. Supporting the resolution passed by the APC, the PML-N leader said the western route will be given preference and the smaller provinces will be given all the benefits attached with the corridor project.

ANP’s Mian Iftikhar Hussain made it clear that his party will not accept the project until Baloch and Pashtun territories are not included in all the segments of the corridor.

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