

THE NATION

Islamabad

25 April 2017

OBOR Goes Global

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An international conference on the One Belt One Road (OBOR) will be held in Beijing on May 14 and 15, which will be attended by 20 heads of state and government and 50 world's organizations. The initiative of building infrastructure, connectivity, and trade was offered by President Xi Jinping two years ago.

The OBOR offers the world's largest economic corridor and physical infrastructure development program benefiting over 66 countries and 4.4 billion people and even more. To build infrastructure, at least over US\$ 8 trillion are need up to 2020. China is using its huge financial potential of foreign reserves, trade surplus, assistance programs, and its outbound investments to build infrastructure worldwide.

China set up a new financial institution, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF) to finance the Silk Road projects. Chinese companies have been geared up to undertake OBOR projects with individual countries. Projects are advanced in Pakistan and Indonesia.

The initiative surpassed all development programs offered by UN organisations or world's institutions. A truly globalised world will be built under the OBOR initiative. The Chinese Government shares great expectations with a number of countries on this initiative and Chinese diplomacy has been geared up to achieve the goals of the OBOR.

What is actually the Beijing OBOR Consensus? China is replacing the United States and European powers. Japan's economic might is being threatened. China came up with big approach to solve basic economic problems of Asian countries. The Chinese leadership realized glaring gaps among Asian economies.

China has fourteen neighbors. Japan and South Korea do not physically border with China. Russia and India are China's strongest neighbours and they have huge potential to grow in the future but they also face economic problems. The other twelve neighbors in South East Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Central Asian face economic bottlenecks and are under-developed economies.

Chinese leadership has paid attention to these countries and desired to elevate the economic level of these countries to developing a meaningful relationship with the emerging Chinese global economy. This is not a tactical or strategic move by China to gain influence in Asia but its policy was moved by economic necessities.

China desires global cooperation among all nations irrespective of their economic system and political affiliation as it believes that eradication of poverty and bringing equal development are universal goals. The OBOR brings the dawn of the new era of globalization. It is the most ambitious program of the present century. It is a universal initiative and all inclusive and it hardly left out a nation.

The OBOR makes the forgotten and ignored South Pacific Oceanic countries relevant again. Premier Li Keqiang visited Australia and New Zealand recently. Australia can be benefited from the OBOR as the country's largest trading partner is China. In 2015-16, China accounted for 26.5% of Australia's total merchandise trade.

For New Zealand, its joining of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, linking South East Asian countries with China, would be beneficial. New Zealand will be the last point of the Maritime Silk Road. New Zealand also wants to play its part on the Silk Road development to integrate the South Pacific with the Silk Road. New Zealand is the founding member of the AIIB.

After the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) received setback as a result of the withdrawal of the United States, OBOR offers immense opportunities to the Oceanic and the South Pacific region. Those we declined were also given a space to join the initiative as the OBOR is invitation-based and all inclusive and fosters anti-bloc politics.

The OBOR is not a regional trading bloc consisting of a few or a group of countries focusing on free trade that also brings conditions. The OBOR is an open initiative and it multiplies opportunities. The OBOR is not even wholly a Chinese enterprise. At the start of the OBOR initiative, China hoped to grow its annual trade volume with OBOR countries from US\$1 trillion in 2013 to US\$2.5 trillion within a decade. This amounts to 9.6 per cent of annual growth.

The space to China is being provided, by default, by the United States because of its unending military adventures worldwide and the lacklustre response of the European powers after that got entangled into tackling of terrorism and shirking of economies. Russia was

busy with the counter strategic approach with the United States and Europe to gain influence. Japan is handicapped by its recession and lack of growth. China speedily filled that vacuum left by these powers. It was rightly described by many as the Beijing Consensus replacing the Washington and European Consensus.

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