



Reaping Benefits from CPEC

By Muhammad Sohail Ahmed

A milestone has been achieved by both Pakistan and China. The highest border on the face of the earth is the one at Khunjerab pass linking Pakistan and China by highway. This is only the beginning for a great friendship corridor as there is a railway link in the making and trans-shipment of goods for subsequent sea transport. Both nations maintaining their sovereignty and legal equality have started to become a role model for diplomats and international lawmakers.

The roads connecting the State of China with Gwadar through Karachi and Balochistan linking Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Sukkur connects all the four provinces of Pakistan in a chain of road links that has now been completed with railway networks to follow. Interestingly, the sovereignty of Pakistan has been kept as a benchmark for the project. The funding is in the form of a loan which should be easily paid off through collection of toll on the model of

Build, Operate and Transfer (BoT). First such project was constructed with the help of Korean Company, Daewoo. The invested amount has been paid off and the Motorway Section M-1 and M-2 connecting Islamabad with Lahore and Faisalabad is successfully operating. This section has already become part of the CPEC net. In order to learn from past experiences of running motorway, feed-back should be utilized from the concerned government department prior to finalizing the contours of the second phase of CPEC.

This also provides a role model for initiating a process or formulation of a new model on the exploitation of road infrastructure for economic activities. Rails and roads are the cheapest means of commuting in our country. The travel time through the improved road and rail infrastructure can be reduced to half as the distance in some cases has reduced with a speed of 120 km/hr, throughout the journey. Small farms need to be developed along the

motorway to transport vegetables, livestock, grains, seasonal fruit and dairy products. Tourist sights already identified by Pakistan tourism development should be reworked to offer tourist packages to locals and international visitors particularly from China.

The next step would be to open universities and vocational training institutes all along the road; increasing literacy, reducing travel time for remote day scholars and better training opportunities for Human Resource. In order to inculcate moral and religious values and ethics, there is a need to open small religious education centres in the mosques located at petrol pumps. This will also be a source of basic religious education for the local population and the project will earn goodwill from the locals of all regions through which the corridor road would pass. This will, therefore, improve the security and goodwill for the Pakistani government as well as for the Chinese. Any project with goodwill at the grass-root level is likely to be politically and economically workable.

The toll plazas should be utilized for quick collection of funds and swift flow of transport using technology like e-toll. Local and international investors should be encouraged to develop farms for the production of vegetable, fruit and livestock for use in the country and export. While planning and developing special economic zones, the proximity of potential production zones and the resources must be identified. For example, the orange and nectar of Sargodha are famous therefore packing and preserving industry in the economic zone would boost export. So far our exporters are dependent on air transport system which is comparatively expensive and it is difficult to compete in the international market. The cheapest means of transport is through the sea. The port of Gwadar could be utilized for exports towards the west and empty containers returning from Gwadar to China should be used for exports to China.

With the increase in the world population of Muslims, the government of Saudi Arabia has prepared a vision of the Kingdom. This vision includes enhancing the number of Haj and Umra devotees permissible to all countries. This includes Pakistanis and Chinese both and there is a scope to provide cheap travel to the

Holy land through road and sea. Travel agents, tour operators and the ministry of religious affairs should join hand in glove to make land and sea Haj and Umra Package. Every year, Pakistan spends sixty billion rupees on Haj and Umra tours. This is besides the tours to religious shrines in Iran and Iraq. The port of Gwadar or Karachi should be utilized to ferry the pilgrims. A large number of individuals would be willing to avail 'CPEC Economy Umra Package'. This project goes in sync with the Saudi vision and is likely to gain popularity from all stakeholders. Organisations like Bahria Foundation could be utilized to train mariners. The investment could be either through the ministry of port and shipping or through private channels/entrepreneurs.

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To facilitate the travellers, most of the airports operated Duty-Free Shops should be brought in action. However, the seaports of Pakistan also need to work on operating such shops. Similarly, the exclusive identified sites at the corridor may also have duty free outlets on subsidized prices. The travellers using the road as a means of transport would be fascinated by such initiative and job opportunities for the locals will also become available.

One of the major pluses of CPEC is that the channels of communication between both governments always remain open with an open mind and mutual trust. This is a very important denominator and keeps both the stakeholders contented and friendly. The will of the people on both sides further adds to this assurance, therefore there is no doubt that Allah is willing this will be a win-win project. Although the name of this project reflects economic growth but in actual it is an all-rounder project focusing on political, commercial, cultural and military cooperation ■



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