



## CPEC: Epitome of infallible bonds

May 21, 2016 marked sixty fifth anniversary of Pak-China relations. To celebrate these tensile, unique and enviable bonds the two countries have chalked out a programme of week-long festivities, cultural events and projection of the nature and scope of the relationship through media. Both the countries have all the reasons to celebrate it as is evident from the history of relations between the two. The time-tested, ever growing ties between the two countries derive their depth from geographical proximity, shared geo-political interests, shared perception on regional security, issues of global concern and the snow-balling and mutually beneficial economic and military ties spanning well over six decades. China has not only contributed to the economic development of Pakistan but has also helped Pakistan in strengthening its defence, to ward off security threats by extending liberal military assistance and boosting its nuclear programme. It has always stood by Pakistan in times of adversity. China is also one of the largest trading partner of Pakistan. The volume of bilateral trade between the two countries which stood at \$ 7 billion in 2008 reportedly has increased more than \$ 17 billion dollars as revealed by the Chinese ambassador.

Heavy Mechanical Complex Taxila, Heavy Forge and Foundary, Aeronautical Complex Kamra, Chashma nuclear plant and KKH are some of the monumental projects that have played a very significant role in changing economic profile of Pakistan. China is already involved in a number of power producing ventures including Neelum Jhelum Project and construction of roads in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir.

Pakistan has also reciprocated and complimented Chinese friendly gestures by supporting one China policy, helping it out of international isolation, orchestrating its rapprochement with USA and supporting its stance on global and regional issues like a true friend. It is also supportive of China in regards to its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The friendship and partnership between the two countries was given new dimension and trajectory during the visit of the Chinese President His Excellency Xi Jin Ping to Pakistan in April 2015 when 51 MOUs for projects under the umbrella of CPEC were formalised. CPEC has rightly been billed as a vehicle for ushering in an era of prosperity and transformation for the entire region besides accruing infinite benefits to both China and Pakistan. This mega economic

initiative has undoubtedly caused an exponential enhancement in relations between the two countries and given permanence to strategic partnership between them that holds the promise of not only serving the geo-political, economic and security interests of both of them but also the South Asian region as well as Central Asia.

Pakistan rightly feels proud of aligning itself with the new Chinese vision for regional connectivity and shared economic prosperity purported to be realized through revival of the old silk route and the building of CPEC. These are epoch making initiatives dictated by the phenomenal economic progress of China and changing regional and global realities fraught with throwing open infinite opportunities to exploit the hitherto untapped resources for shared economic gains. The completion of the projects under the umbrella of CPEC will have a revolutionary impact on the economic profile of Pakistan and go a long way in changing the lives of people belonging to all the four provinces, as rightly noted and pointed out by His Excellency Xi Jin Ping during his visit to Pakistan. The CPEC will turn Pakistan into an economic hub for the region with all the accompanying benefits on perennial basis.

China would also undoubtedly benefit from this undertaking in many ways and be in a much better position to expand its commercial interests on the global level by securing shortest possible access route to the Arabian Sea as well as to import oil for its industrial machine at a much lesser cost and time. It would indeed be a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan and the countries of the region. Pakistan is a naturally endowed country. Its geo-strategic location connecting three main sub-regions of Asia provides it with a unique advantage which can help China in furthering its economic and strategic objectives.

Pakistan currently is engaged in a decisive war against terrorism that poses great threat to peace, security and tranquility in the region affecting almost all the regional countries in varying degrees. Pakistan as a frontline state in the war against terrorism and having suffered colossal economic losses in this battle and having endured its negative impact on the security situation in the country, understands and appreciates Chinese concerns about the security challenges in its Sinkiang province as a consequence of the terrorist activities of ETIM and stands with it in combating the threat. The security interests of Pakistan and China are interconnected. China is also appreciative and supportive of Pakistan's efforts in regards to tackling terrorism and both the countries have resolved to work together to confront this common challenge both at the bilateral level and through cooperative efforts of the countries of the region. China also stands by Pakistan in resolving the Afghan conundrum and is part of the quadrilateral initiative for bringing the Taliban and the Afghan government on the table to promote process of reconciliation and finding an Afghan-led and Afghan owned solution to the conflict in that country. China and Pakistan are also vital for peace and security in the region.

Both China and Pakistan have high stakes in the CPEC. For China it is a pivot of its 'One Belt, One Road' vision and revival of the Silk Route. For Pakistan it is an unprecedented and epoch-making opportunity to address its economic woes on perennial basis and assuming a central role in developing regional connectivity that holds the promise of unleashing infinite avenues of shared economic prosperity. Our political and military leadership fully understands and acknowledges the vital role that CPEC is destined to play for the economic uplift of Pakistan. They are unanimous in their determination to see this project coming through. They have an unswerving commitment in this regard. A special Security Division has been raised to provide security to the Chinese experts and engineers working on the projects under CPEC and to protect the vital installations, including Gawadar. FWO has been entrusted to construct the corridor routes in Balochistan. The government and military are also working hand in hand with uncompromising resolve to eliminate the scourge of terrorism from the country to provide peaceful environment for the economic activities associated with the implementation of CPEC. Our Chinese friends who are investing \$46 billion in the infrastructure projects and power producing units would surely like and welcome improvement in law and order situation in the country to be able to ensure on-time and unruffled implementation of CPEC. This behemoth economic initiative is certainly an epitome of ever enduring and infallible bonds between Pakistan and China. It is a national project and needs unblemished national ownership.

In view of the importance of CPEC for Pakistan and machinations of some internal and external elements to sabotage it, we as a nation have to be on our guard and show impregnable unity to forestall their designs.