

### **China rejects Indian objections to CPEC**

ISLAMABAD: China has rejected India's objections about China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for staying absent from the upcoming second Belt and Road Forum (BRF), schedule for which was finalised in the last week of the month in Beijing.

China on Monday played down India's reported plans to boycott the upcoming forum, saying India may have misunderstood the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and suggested to New Delhi "wait and see" before taking a decision.

India didn't attend the first BRF where Pakistan was represented by then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping when he came to power in 2013.

It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes. The second BRF meeting will be held April 25 to 27 in Beijing. China has already said officials of over 100 countries besides 40 government leaders have agreed to take part in it including Russian President Putin, Turkish President Erdogan and Prime Minister Imran.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang told a media briefing that the BRI is an economic cooperation project and it does not involve territorial disputes. "On Indian comments on not participating in the BRI for various reasons, I would like to say that the BRI is an open and inclusive economic cooperation initiative. It does not involve territorial and maritime disputes," he said.

The \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which has been officially designated as a flagship project of the BRI, has been invoking ire of India as the project is being laid through Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). India has already protested to China over the CPEC violating its sovereignty and boycotted the first BRF held in 2017.

Asked for comments on India's reported plans to boycott the 2nd BRF, Kang said, "Whether the Indian side will participate in the BRI forum; I think you need to ask India for a more specific answer." In BRI, China and other countries uphold the principle of equality, openness inclusiveness and transparency, he added.

"We follow market based principles and the customary international rules," the spokesman said. "I think may be some sides have misunderstandings on the BRI and thus have some wrong judgment. Please know that China follows principle of cooperation and consultation for shared benefit and that principle will not change," he said.

Asked whether China is suggesting that India would miss out a lot by not participating in the event, Lu said, "BRI has been an open and inclusive initiative for all countries and organisations interested in this." "But of course, if the relevant side would like to wait and see, we do not oppose that and as for the participation of international organisations in the BRF, some countries are losing out on opportunities. You may need to ask the countries that don't participate in the BRF," he said.

Lu said BRI is already a success. "I would like to re-emphasise that the BRI is proposed by China but it is already an international public good. The first BRF has been success and many practical outcomes were achieved. And now more international organisations and countries are participating in the BRI cooperation. I think it speaks volumes," he said. The BRF is being held to consolidate China's trillion-dollar BRI to further its global influence by financing and building massive infrastructure projects throughout the world.