

China terms recent criticism about CPEC projects mere 'propaganda'

Page NO.08 Col No.06

BEIJING: Pakistani officials and experts have pushed back against criticisms of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), describing recently raised concerns about projects under the programme as "propaganda" based on false information intended to undermine the close cooperation between China and Pakistan.

China holds in high esteem Pakistan's determination giving further boost to the ever-green Sino-Pak strategic partnership through implementation of CPEC's related projects, this was stated by the Chinese media's delegation that recently visited Pakistan.

As Pakistan faces a foreign exchange crisis and undergoes a political transition, CPEC, which is a flagship programme of the China-proposed Belt and Road initiative, has increasingly become a main target of rising criticism by some foreign organizations and officials in recent weeks, who alleged that the projects have caused public debt and aided corruption in Pakistan.

But, according to the Chinese media, Pakistani officials and experts noted that infrastructure and energy projects have already brought tangible benefits to the people of Pakistan without putting extra financial burden on the Pakistani economy, and Pakistan is ready to take CPEC to the next level of industrial development.

Quoting Pakistani Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua, a Global Times report stated obviously because of the very close relations between Pakistan and China, there are many people out there who don't like this closeness and don't like this relationship.

Janjua during the meeting with the Chinese media noted that the CPEC projects are not only beneficial for Pakistan economically but also socially as they will help improve people's lives.

"All the projects are basically for energy and infrastructure. How will that not help the local people?" asked Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad.

"Not every country is happy about Pakistan-China cooperation, so they keep spreading negative news about CPEC," said Chaudhry.

Chaudhry suggested that India and the US might have been behind what he described as "propaganda" against CPEC.

"One country which has openly said that it is not happy is India," Chaudhry said, noting that India has long claimed that CPEC runs through its territory.

He further noted that the US and India have moved closer to each other because of their shared interests against CPEC.

"But we should not get deterred by this propaganda," he said.

Shaukat Khattak, a senior official Pakistani Ministry of Planning Development and Reforms, pointed out that since the start of the CPEC projects, Pakistan has only obtained about \$6 billion in loans, which are

government concessional loans with a five-year grace period before repayment of 25 years.

“So it will have, as you can see, minimum burden on the Pakistani economy it will not have the debt burden as projected by some international organizations,” Khattak told reporters on Monday, adding that the benefits from CPEC projects have already been seen at minimum cost.

Khattak further pointed out that CPEC projects have already helped significantly with power shortages in Pakistan and are estimated to create as many as one million jobs in Pakistan.

Khalid Mahmood, Chairman of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, said that activities boosted by CPEC projects will help Pakistan pay back its debts.

“Following the implementation of CPEC projects, from energy projects to infrastructure projects to ports, it's going to generate economic activity, and that activity will enable Pakistan to pay back its loans or to meet other financial obligations,” Mahmood told the Chinese media.—INP