

CPEC

CPEC – A Pilot Model for Eco-civilization Concept of China

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China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an ongoing mega development project that aims to connect Gwadar port of Pakistan to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang via a network of highways, railways and pipelines. The economic corridor is considered central to China-Pakistan relations and is stretched over 2700 km from Gwadar to Kashghar. CPEC is expected to be a strategic game changer for the region that aims to make Pakistan an economically viable and business-friendly country. Investments under CPEC in the power generation and distribution sectors are providing a momentous boost to the economy. Moreover, several large-scale investments in infrastructure and industrial growth activities are currently in progress which are expected to further fasten the targeted economic growth of the country. CPEC portfolio has economic and strategic importance both for China and Pakistan. Besides the economic gains from this mega development project, the Government of Pakistan can also envision the development of CPEC on the principles of Chinese eco-civilization concept and make this project a pilot model of eco-civilization for the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) countries.

What is basically eco-civilization and how can the CPEC be turned into a model for eco-civilization? The concept of eco-civilization is embedded in the ancient Chinese philosophy, wisdom and culture. Eco-civilization is a

comprehensive concept for a systematic understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature. According to Chinese philosophy, the relationship between human and nature should be harmonious and in unity. The idea was first echoed from China and was included in the report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In 2012, the 18th National Congress of the CPC put forward the eco-civilization concept into the national strategy and integrated it with the overall development of the Chinese economy, politics, society and culture. In 2015, the 13th five-year plan (2016-2020) incorporated the concept as an important strategy to deal with the environmental protection and ecological conservation.

The basic aim of eco-civilization remains reversal of the ecological deterioration from the source, creating a good environment for production and living and making contribution to international ecological safety. It follows the principles of resource conservation, environmental protection and giving priority to natural restoration of the ecology. Under the concept of eco-civilization, the goals are achieved by promoting green development, carrying out recycling activities and crafting initiatives related to the low-carbon and resilient development. It also requires forming a spatial pattern and industrial structure that is based on resource saving and environmental protection. Eco-civilization is not a theoretical concept rather a practical milestone that is being followed by China and has shown signs of progression as well. To achieve targets under this concept, China has focused on energy development and prevention and control of air and water pollution as well. It has developed, as well as implemented, certain policies to eliminate the outdated industrial units, enhanced pollutant discharge controls, adjusted industrial structures from the root and decreased pollutant discharge, increased green investment, promoted environmental governance and developed environment-friendly industrial zones. These policies and measures of China have been successful so far. The environment-friendly industrial set-ups have generated revenues as well. China has now become a leading exporter of the renewable products. Pilot projects for carbon trading have been launched in China under the eco-civilization strategy with the closure of numerous outdated industrial units; all these efforts have recorded a decrease in air and water pollution in China. The zeal for eco-civilization does not stop here, rather China now envisions to turn this strategy of eco-civilization from a national to an international canvas and aims to achieve sustainable development and a harmonious world through eco-civilization concept.

CPEC also needs to be developed in an environmentally sustainable and ecologically conversant manner. Pakistan should keep its skies blue and land green. The initial 1+4 portfolio of CPEC promises rapid development into the areas of energy, infrastructure development, industrial cooperation and development of Gwadar. Yet this rapid development is also raising some concerns on the environment and climate change front. Environmental effects of CPEC projects may include spatial and temporal dimensions and biotic and abiotic components as well. In addition, other indirect impacts may also be occurred to habitats and ecosystems caused by the footprint of some connecting activities. Large scale projects under CPEC may lead to disturbance in soil conditions as well. Moreover, energy projects may result in higher greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). CPEC routes pass through the populous areas of the country and deterioration in air quality may occur in these areas as well. Thus a number of environmental concerns are being raised on CPEC portfolio. The strategy to address all such problems may be chalked out under the basic principles of eco-civilization. The basic components of eco-civilization – low

carbon development, decreasing pollution, protecting nature and promoting ecological conservation – may mitigate many of the potential environmental impacts of CPEC.

CPEC is the flagship project of BRI initiated by China and when it comes to turning the CPEC as a model of eco-civilization, Gwadar can rightly serve as flagship as it has the impetus to be developed in an ecologically civilized manner and can serve as role model for other projects being developed and executed under BRI. The need of the hour is to adopt eco-civilization concept as one of the national strategies in Pakistan for innovative, concerted, green, open and inclusive development. Since Gwadar is being developed into a smart port city under CPEC and its Master Plan is under preparation as well, this is the right time to pitch in the elements of eco-civilization including creation of ecological values, strengthening ecological education and establishing ecological conscientiousness and citizenship in Gwadar.

The application of eco-civilization is developing dynamically in China based on the practical experience made with the new policy approaches. Pakistan, in this regard, can also learn from the Chinese experience and can develop CPEC – specifically Gwadar – as flagship of eco-civilization. This will not only ensure environmental sustainability and ecological conservation of the CPEC portfolio but will also enable Pakistan to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The recent steps, such as 10-billion tree plantation campaign, is an excellent move by the present government to increase greenery in the country. More such initiatives, in line with the principles of eco-civilization, can bring additional positive results and may create a win-win situation in Pakistan both on the economic and the humanity fronts.

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