Introduction

Institute of Regional Studies Peshawar was registered in 1980 under the Societies Act of 1860. IRS was reorganized in April 2008 under an independent Board of Directors with Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Khalil as the Chairperson. The BoD consist of academicians, professionals, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, consultants, social and political activists. IRS works as a reputable Think-Tank to generate, share and advocate research-based information on socio-economic and political issues concerning Pakistan. IRS also contributes towards enhancing partners' efficiency and effectiveness through developing human and institutional capacities for improved governance, making informed policy decisions and evolving effective strategies.

Geographical Focus

Geographically IRS is concerned with the socio-political and economic issues related to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, China and Iran.

Sectors in Focus

IRS activities are focused on governance issues related to Education, Health, Foreign Affairs, and Economic development.

Funding Sources

Primarily, the program and management cost of IRS is being covered through donations received from philanthropists, and revenues generated through training and consulting services.

CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Background

Launched in 2015, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This project is aimed to strengthen economic and trade ties between the two nations. Covering over 3,000 kilometers, CPEC links China’s Xinjiang region to Pakistan’s Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea, providing a more efficsient, all-weather trade route for China to access markets in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

CPEC has several key objectives, primarily focused on promoting economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. It invests heavily in transportation, modernizing road and rail networks to connect northern Pakistan with the south. This will reduce China's reliance on longer sea routes and cutting transportation costs. The project also addresses Pakistan’s chronic energy shortages by funding the development of thermal, hydro, wind, and solar power plants, which are expected to significantly expand Pakistan’s national energy grid. In addition, CPEC includes the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to attract foreign investment, stimulate industrial growth, and create employment opportunities. Gwadar Port, a centerpiece of the initiative, is being developed into a major deep-sea shipping hub, offering China direct access to the Indian Ocean and strategically boosting maritime trade.

Strategically, CPEC is important both for China and Pakistan. For China, it provides a shorter, more secure trade route, reducing its dependency on the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait, both of which are prone to geopolitical risks. For Pakistan, CPEC is seen as an economic lifeline, offering much-needed infrastructure upgradation, foreign investment, and a stronger bilateral relationship with China. Additionally, it enhances China’s influence in the South Asian and Indian Ocean regions, positioning Gwadar Port as a cornerstone in China's broader strategy to secure trade routes and extend its global reach.

The strategic implications of CPEC for both China and Pakistan make it an essential topic for analysis and discussion. For China, CPEC offers a more secure and efficient trade route, reducing its reliance on geopolitically sensitive areas such as the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. For Pakistan, CPEC serves as an economic lifeline, delivering crucial infrastructure improvements, foreign investment, and a strengthened bilateral relationship with China.

CPEC’s initial estimated cost was around US $ 46 billion, which is now touching the figure of US $ 60 billion. A major chunk of this funding will be provided through Chinese loans and investments, largely from state-owned enterprises and banks. While this investment creates job opportunities and infrastructure improvements, concerns have been raised over Pakistan’s growing debt obligations due to these loans.

In light of the key importance and complexity of CPEC, a roundtable discussion was arranged by Peshawar based Think Tank, Institute of Regional Studies on 29th August 2024 at it’s Conference. This event was aimed to bring together experts from various sectors to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the opportunities, challenges, and future of this transformative initiative. It is anticipated that this discussion will provide a platform to the academicians, policymakers, industry leaders, opinion makers, businessmen, and civil society representatives to explore

CPEC's potential impacts on Pakistan's economy, regional stability, and global trade dynamics. The purpose of this event was to foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and a deeper understanding of how CPEC can best serve the economic and strategic interests of Pakistan, while addressing the concerns and challenges that accompany such a large-scale project.

The event was attended by academicians, retired bureaucrats, political activists, journalists, businessmen, importers, exporters, social media activists, religious scholars, tribal leaders, and civil society activists. Besides other participants, the following notable academicians and professionals were also present in the event: -

1. Prof. Dr. Ghulam Qasim Marwat,

Former Director Higher Education Department, Director Higher Education Academy of Research and Training (HEART), Currently working in Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar.

2. Dr. Zahid Anwar,

Former Chairman Political Science Depatment, Director China Study Center, Former Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar.

3: Prof. Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan,

Former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and
Former Chairman, Department of Int'l Relations, University of Peshawar.

4. Engr. Aziz ul Haq,

Consultant AGES

5. Engr. Muhammad Naeem,

Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO),
Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

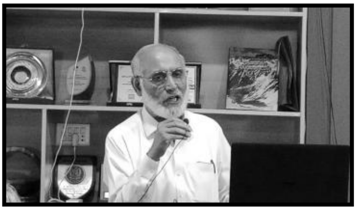
6. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Khalil,

Chairman, Institute of Regional Studies Peshawar

7. Prof. Dr. Fazlur Rahman Qureshi,

Vice-Chairman, Insitute of Regional Studies Peshawar

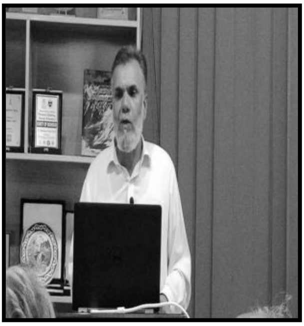
❖ **Prof. Dr. Fazlur Rahman Qureshi, Vice Chairman IRS,**



welcomed the participants and highlighted the role and functions of the Institute. While explaining the aims and objectives of the roundtable discussion, he highlighted that all of us have certain level of information about various aspects of CPEC. However, purpose of holding this event is to accumulate and synthesize the information in light of the experts' opinion and background knowledge.

He further added that with the esteemed presence of subject experts and professionals, the participants would be well-positioned to explore various aspects of this significant project in a conducive environment. He emphasized that all participants are at liberty to express their views, which are essential for enhancing the collective knowledge and understanding of the topic under discussion. The introductory remarks were followed by detailed lectures of the following experts:

❖ **Engr. Aziz ul Haq, Partner, AGES Consultant**



gave a detailed lecture through maps and figures. He provided the participants with an overview of the technical aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with a particular focus on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He explained that in 2006, China introduced a plan to develop the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, commonly referred to as the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR), also known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He emphasized that CPEC is a key component of this broader initiative.

(Source: AGES Consultants)

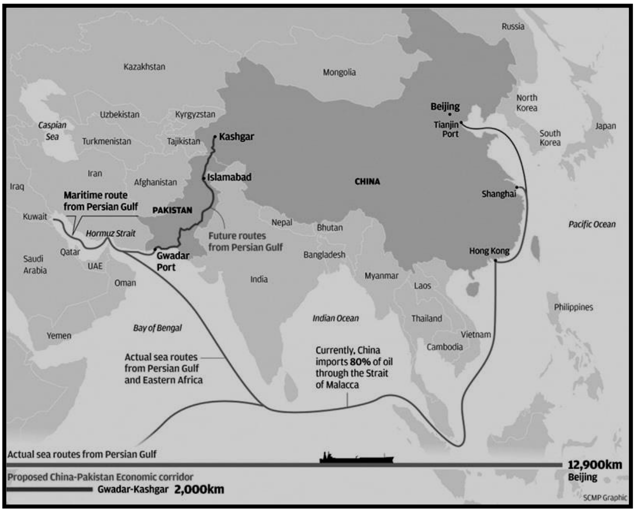
He elaborated that the BRI consists of the following components:-

- China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor
- China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor
- China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor

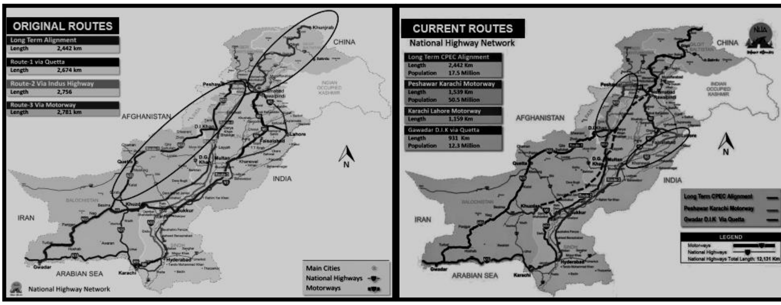
As shown on the map, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) spans several major cities, including Hanoi, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, nearly all of Pakistan, Calcutta, Almaty, Samarkand, Tehran, Moscow, and Nairobi, extending across Europe to Venice, Italy.

Referring to the selection of Gwadar Port, Engineer Aziz ul Haq highlighted several key reasons why China chose this port for CPEC. He explained, using the map, that 40% of the world's oil passes through Gwadar Port. Additionally, China imports 80% of its daily oil consumption of 11 million barrels through the Strait of Malacca, a route that is vulnerable to sea piracy between Indonesia and Malaysia. Furthermore, the distance through the Strait of Malacca to reach China is approximately 12,000 km, whereas the CPEC route through Gwadar reduces this distance to just 4,000 km. This shorter route enables China to save about US $ 3 billion annually in oil transportation costs while avoiding the security risks of the Malacca route and potential containment in Hong Kong, where tensions between the US and China persists. He also noted that Gwadar offers the shortest route for Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Oman to reach China. Likewise, it provides China with the most direct access to the Middle East.



(Source: AGES Consultants)

Referring to the CPEC, routes and projects, Engr. Aziz informed that its western route connects Pakistan with China is stretched from Khanjarab Pass to Hassan Abdal. Being the only available route, its major chunk passes through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province alongside the existing KKH. Its second route is from Peshawar to D. I. Khan through Indus Highway. Its third route is from Islamabad to D. I. Khan, connecting Hassan Abdal to Southern Pakistan. An additional motorway from Lahore to Abdul Hakeem was constructed which was not part of original CPEC plan. Its fourth route is from Peshawar through M1, M2 till Karachi. These routes are highlighted in the maps given below:-



(Source: AGES Consultants)

Engr. Aziz ul Haq went on saying that in the energy sector, there were initial hopes that the project would lead to the development of indigenous power generation mechanisms. However, the Independent Power Producer (IPP) model was adopted, with a total financial allocation of US $ 33.79 billion. This model's high costs, particularly in terms of capacity payments and mounting circular debt, have sparked concerns among the Pakistani public. For road and rail sector projects, allocations of US $ 5.9 billion and US $ 3.69 billion, respectively, have been made, with an interest rate of 1.6%. However, the Chinese authorities were initially not in favour of constructing the Lahore Metro Bus. As a result, it was included in the project at a financial outlay of US $ 1.6 billion, with an increased interest rate of 2.4%, higher than that for the road and rail sector projects.

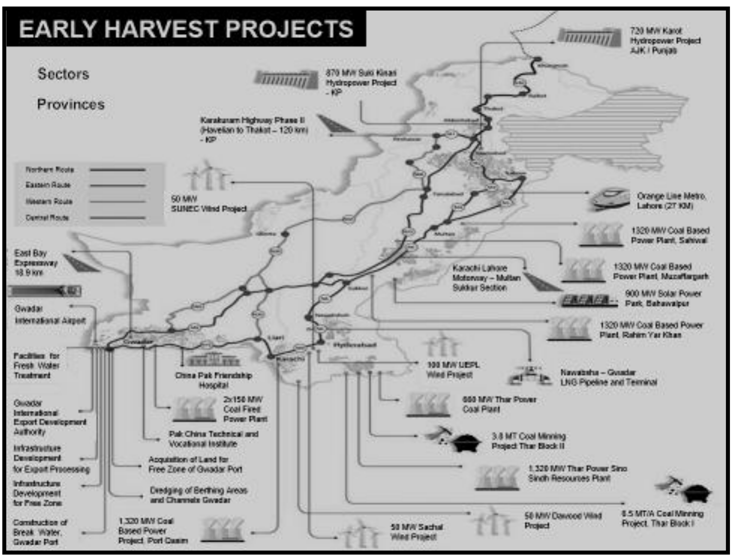
CPEC FUNDING (Loan - not Grant)

SECTOR	**AMOUNT (US $ Billion)**	**Financing Mode**	**Repaying Mode**
Energy	33.79	Investment - IPP	7.99 - 8.5 US Cent per kWh (unit)
Roads	5.9	Loan	1.6%
Rail	3.69	Loan	1.6%

Lahore Metro	1.6	Loan	2.4%
Gwadar Port	0.66	Loan	0%
Fiber Optic	0.04	Loan	2%
Total	**45.69**		

(Source: AGES Consultants)

Engr. Aziz further elaborated that there were early harvest projects which were supposed to be completed upto 2018. However, some of them are still under construction which include 720 MW hydropower project at Karot (AJK), 870 MW hydropower Sukki Kenari (KP). However, these hydropower projects are run on IPP mode.



(Source: AGES Consultants)

Engr. Aziz added that CPEC was expected to be a game changer for Pakistan in terms of improved road infrastructure, overcoming the energy shortfall, generating employment opportunities, technology transfer and economic and financial benefits. However, the experts have expressed serious concerns over these projects as per points highlighted below:-

All Energy Sector projects are on IPP mode of investment. The existing system of capacity payments and increased power tariff has made Pakistani masses in severe crunch of financial challenges.

Road sector is being developed on loan basis and the energy sector through Investment. In order to achieve greater economic benefits and ensure feasible repayment of debt, it should have been vice-versa because energy sector has the most repaying ratio.

Most of the energy projects under CPEC are run on imported coal. Hydropower, which has the highest payback rate, not given a priority. Hydropower potential especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has hardly been developed.

In the implementation of CPEC, Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) Bylaws have not been implemented. Hence, opportunities for employment for Pakistani Engineers/ professionals and transfer of technology has not been guaranteed. The extract from the relevant rules of PEC is reproduced below:

“Foreign constructor or foreign operator” means an enterprise fully owned by one or more foreign nationals having minimum fifty-one percent shares or any enterprise incorporated with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and having minimum fifty-one percent shares of foreign nationals with minimum seventy percent of its engineering staff from Pakistan”.

CPEC was actually China’s need but we couldn’t exploit to harvest many benefits for Pakistan through negotiations and bargaining tactics.

❖ **Prof. Dr. Ghulam Qasim Marwat**

In his plenary lecture, Prof. Dr. Ghulam Qasim Marwat Delivered a thorough examination of the multifaceted challenges surrounding the CPEC. He articulated that those managing CPEC in Pakistan often struggle to fully comprehend the project's complexities or lack the requisite capacity to maximize its potential benefits. This disconnect, he argued, has significantly contributed to the persistent hurdles and setbacks encountered by the project over the years, ultimately limiting its capacity to catalyze economic growth and development in Pakistan.

To understand CPEC effectively, Dr. Marwat emphasized the importance of analyzing China's distinctive development model. Historically, China emerged from a backdrop of extreme poverty and was subjected to imperialism, which laid the groundwork for a transformative socialist revolution under Mao Zedong. He highlighted a critical distinction between China and Russia: while Russia functioned as an empire composed of various nations, China developed as a unified nation-state, predominantly supported by its peasantry rather than an industrial working class. This fundamental difference has allowed China to engage constructively with global partners, facilitating collaborations even with nations that have differing ideologies.

Dr. Marwat elaborated on how this adaptability has been a cornerstone of China's sustained economic growth, particularly in contrast to the decline of the Russian model. China's development has been driven by its vast labour force and rich natural resources, but it initially grappled with significant challenges related to capital investment and entrepreneurial skills. To mitigate these deficiencies, China strategically allied with the United States and Western Europe, successfully attracting foreign investment by offering favourable conditions, including state guarantees that reduced risks for investors. This approach not only enabled China to leverage foreign expertise and capital but also facilitated rapid industrialization and economic transformation, allowing it to navigate the complexities of global economics.

This collaboration, as underscored by Dr. Marwat, laid the foundation for remarkable economic growth and catalyzed initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC. The BRI envisions the creation of a modern silk road to enhance China's connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa, emphasizing economic development and regional integration over geopolitical ambitions. CPEC, as a crucial component of the BRI, must similarly be approached through an economic lens rather than being confined by geopolitical considerations.

However, Dr. Marwat pointed out that many stakeholders in Pakistan frame CPEC within geopolitical contexts, a perspective shaped by the country's historical involvement during the Great Game and the Cold War. He argued that this entrenched mindset complicates the understanding of CPEC as a genuine economic development initiative, obscuring its potential to drive growth and prosperity. Additionally, Pakistan's ongoing security concerns and its long-standing war economy further hinder the effective realization of CPEC's benefits, as the project is often managed by security agencies or financial professionals lacking robust economic expertise.

Despite the potential for CPEC to enhance infrastructure and stabilize the economy, Dr. Marwat highlighted that the project faces significant threats from insurgent groups, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. He stressed that these security challenges not only undermine the progress of CPEC but also deter crucial foreign investment. To overcome these obstacles, Dr. Marwat asserted that Pakistan must undergo a paradigm shift—prioritizing economic development over entrenched geopolitical narratives. The nation possesses a strategic geographic position that could facilitate trade with Central Asia and beyond; however, internal routes remain disconnected due to persistent security fears, stifling economic activity.

In addition to these points, Dr. Marwat emphasized the importance of understanding the four factors of production land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurship in the context of China's economic model. He noted that while China possesses abundant labour and natural resources, it initially struggled with a lack of capital and entrepreneurship. Through its strategic partnerships, China effectively compensated for these deficiencies, leading to a hybrid model that merged elements of socialism with capitalist practices, thus creating a unique framework for economic growth.

Moreover, Dr. Marwat discussed the urgent need for Pakistan to evolve its approach to international relations. He noted that the complexities of these relationships require an understanding that countries can simultaneously act as friends and competitors—what he termed "frienemies." This hybrid nature of relationships, particularly exemplified by U.S.-China dynamics, underscores the necessity of pragmatism in economic partnerships. By recognizing this reality, Pakistan can foster more effective collaborations that transcend ideological divides and focus on mutual economic interests.

Ultimately, Prof. Dr. Ghulam Qasim Marwat concluded that Pakistan stands at a critical crossroads, facing pivotal choices that could significantly shape its future. He urged the nation to prioritize peace over conflict, fostering trade instead of enmity, and balancing national interests with global obligations. By moving away from a focus on military concerns and embracing economic opportunities—especially in the context of CPEC—Pakistan can lay the groundwork for sustainable development, enhanced regional integration, and greater prosperity for its citizens.

Dr. Marwat posited that recognizing the transformative potential of CPEC as an economic initiative could enable Pakistan to reclaim its historical role as a hub of trade and commerce. He stressed that by nurturing a mindset geared toward economic growth and stability, Pakistan could pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for all its people.

- **Prof. Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan**

While expressing his views, Prof. Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan attached great hopes to the youth and emphasized to give them chance as they have big thoughts emerging in their minds. Terming the CPEC as massive project aimed to enhance regional connectivity and trade, he pointed towards the joint efforts being made by India, Afghanistan, Western Europe, and the United States to derail this initiative.

Dr. Adnan added that as for those who are making assumptions, no restrictions can be placed on them. Everyone has his own perspective. The USA has ongoing competition and enmity with China over various issues. When a power is rising, it challenges everyone. At the moment, China, too, is a rising power. While it is emerging economically, it is also advancing its missile programme, so we cannot ignore the fact that they could engage in war, in addition to being both friends and competitors.

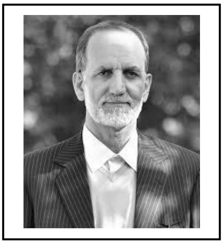
Dr. Adnan Sarwar elaborated that as far as Pakistan's offer regarding trade corridors to other countries is concerned, we opened our sea and land routes for Afghan transit trade in 1955. However, Afghanistan responded to this goodwill gesture with various accusations against Pakistan, even laying claims to Pakistani territories. We are not interested in the North-South conflict; we want CPEC to be completed as soon as possible. The changes in the CPEC routes were not made by Pakistan but were insisted upon by China owing to her own geopolitical considerations.

Referring to the social perspective, Dr. Adnan said that Pakistan is a land of immense cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, here national interest often comes last. We generally tend to view everything through the lens of our ethnic and cultural considerations. The minds of the youth in Balochistan and erstwhile FATA are poisoned with separatist ideologies that are instilled by Afghanistan, Iran, and India. The question is why this has happened? Quaid-e-Azam had withdrawn regular forces from erstwhile FATA, saying that our Pashtun brothers would defend their lands. Now, these Pashtuns are sheltering those who do not tolerate Pakistan's existence. Recently, Punjabi laborers in Balochistan have been selectively targeted and killed. Who is orchestrating this? Has any political party raised its voice against this oppression?

Terming the political instability as the root cause for dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971, Dr. Adnan said that we need to move beyond regionalism and view things in light of their broader contexts. In the 1970s, when Pakistan was dismembered, it was due to the stubbornness of political parties. When the majority is denied their rights, this is what happens which we witnessed in East Pakistan in 1971. The first step in breaking Pakistan was those elections, which are referred to as Pakistan's first democratic elections. The imposition of General Zia's martial law was primarily the result of political parties’ ego and tunnel vision. The fundamental question is why we could not showcase our capability and honesty to the world as India did? We are being known for begging from the world.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan said that CPEC needs to be viewed in its original broader context as an economic model. Pakistan and China are busy building an economic corridor, while terrorist corridors are being established by anti-national forces with the connivance of hostile security agencies of neighbouring countries. The early harvesting projects of CPEC couldn't be completed in 2018 due to political instability. Even high-ranking Pakistani officials requested China to freeze CPEC for a year. With such a mindset, how can CPEC progress? We say that China is one of Pakistan's closest friends. The Chinese say Pakistan is their closest friend. There is a difference in thinking about what they say about us. They say Pakistan has endured global displeasure for their sake, faced pressure from the USA and the United Nations. They are determined and say that they will not leave us alone and will solve all these problems together. China is very determined about CPEC. Dr. Adnan added that we respect the nationalist ideology as well, but we must also consider why our people and law enforcement agencies personnel are being targeted by terrorists, and why hurdles are being created in the way of our economic prosperity? If CPEC is not completed by 2030, then, it will be completed by 2035. But it will be built one day. Recently, the Prime Minister made it crystal clear that we will not abandon China's friendship at any cost

- **Prof. Dr. Zahid Anwar, University of Peshawar**



In his Presidential speech, Prof. Dr. Zahid Anwar deliberated that we must see CPEC in context of Pakistan and its national interest. There can be difference of opinion over CPEC, and we should discuss them so that this mega project aligns with our national interests. The criticism in this forum is constructive, and we should take it into account because, although our relationship with China is important, Pakistan is our top priority. In this regard, we need to be given some space, and it's good that we are listening to such discussions.

He further added that the Cino-Pak relations are based on peaceful coexistence. China has never interfered in Pakistan's internal matters nor threatened us, unlike others who have warned they would push us back into the Stone Age. Chinese Muslims praise our former Martial Law Administrator because his efforts allowed Chinese Muslims to perform Hajj. This respect stems from the opportunities he created for them.

Dr. Zahid further elaborated that as far as the CPEC is concerned, this is an economic corridor. However, it does not mean that if we build a corridor with China, our routes with Afghanistan will be closed. The Peshawar-Kabul motorway is part of CPEC, and so is the Lapis Lazuli Corridor in Afghanistan. CPEC brings regional integration. In this context, Afghanistan is welcomed to join CPEC to enhance its productivity. Some hostile countries through their security agencies are trying to create misunderstandings between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but they won't succeed. With time, regional ties will strengthen further.

While concluding his speech, Dr. Zahid informed the participants that the current security situation in Balochistan is being funded and fueled by India. India never misses an opportunity to block Pakistan's progress. CPEC is a game changer, and it is imperative that we look it from economic perspective. We must understand each other's cultures. The Chinese President holds very positive views regarding Islam. There may be several shortcomings in CPEC, there are also many benefits. We must strive to address these shortcomings and strengthen our friendship with China.

There is ample space for Pakistan in China. However, there are some bureaucratic hurdles in our system which need to be eased to further strengthen our ties. Such informative events provide a platform for providing accurate information about CPEC and misunderstandings will be cleared.

❖ Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Khalil, Chairman IRS expressed his gratitude to the speakers and participants for their insightful contributions. He emphasized the importance of fostering open-hearted dialogue on all matters of national interest, as it is through such discussions that consensus can be built to address the challenges facing the country. Dr. Iqbal Khalil also highlighted the critical need for thorough and careful drafting of any bilateral agreements with other nations, stressing that attention to details is essential to avoid future complications. He lamented that one of Pakistan's recurring issues is its failure to adequately address the technical nuances of such agreements, a shortcoming that has often led to unfavourable outcomes on international platforms.

❖ Recommendations

Based on the plenary lectures of the experts and discussions with the participants, the following recommendations were framed for the relevant stakeholders and policymakers so as to get maximum benefits from CPEC:-

Shifting Focus from Geopolitical to Economic Objectives: In Pakistan, the economically vital CPEC is often seen through a geopolitical lens. Such tunnel approach hampers its potential as an economic growth initiative. CPEC should be approached purely as an economic model, focusing on trade, infrastructure, and job creation rather than geopolitical implications.

Aligning CPEC with National Interests: There should be open discussion on CPEC interventions to ensure that it aligns with Pakistan’s national interests. In this regard, constructive criticism should be welcomed to improve the project.

Strengthening Economic Relations with China: The economic benefits of CPEC may be prioritized with due diligence by considering Pakistan's long-term economic goals.

Promoting Regional Integration: Inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC may be encouraged and facilitated in order to enhance regional connectivity, economic integration, productivity, and cooperation irrespective of the misunderstandings being created by hostile external forces.

Prioritizing Hydropower Projects: The energy projects being undertaken under CPEC heavily rely on imported coal. On the other hand, there are ample opportunities for developing hydropower projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which have a more sustainable option with a higher payback rate. Hence there should be a shift of power generation projects from imported coal to hydel power, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has untapped potential to ensure long term energy sustainability.

Transforming IPP to loan Model: The current surge in electricity tariffs in Pakistan is primarily due to the high production costs paid to the IPPs. By transitioning the existing IPP power generation model under CPEC into a loan-based framework could help alleviate the power crisis in the country and provide much-needed relief to the general public.

Revising Financial Strategies: The current financial strategy for CPEC is focused on road development through loans and energy projects through investment. However, since the energy sector has the highest repayment ratio, therefore, it is recommended to reverse this model, with loans focused on energy projects keeping in view their higher return potential.

Mitigate Security Risks and Attract Foreign Investment:

The prevailing security situation, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, poses a significant risk to the success of CPEC. A stronger focus on addressing insurgency threats is needed to create a stable environment that can attract foreign investment and foster economic development.

Strengthening Negotiation and Bargaining Tactics: Pakistan has not yet fully capitalized on the benefits of CPEC, mainly due to its weak negotiation and bargaining strategies. There should be a stronger focus on negotiating terms that maximize benefits for Pakistan, especially in areas of creating job opportunities, infrastructure development and technology transfer.

Adopting a Pragmatic Foreign Policy Approach: There is a dire need for Pakistan to adopt a more pragmatic approach to international relations, recognizing the hybrid nature of global partnerships and engagements, where countries can be simultaneously allies and competitors. Adopting such an approach will help Pakistan to develop better economic collaborations, especially with China and the USA, and leverage CPEC's potential in a more effective manner.

Prioritizing CPEC Amidst Political Instability: It is recommended that the government and political leaders must play a proactive role to stabilize internal politics for the successful implementation of CPEC. The delays in early harvesting projects are mainly linked to political instability and such distractions be minimized for the success of CPEC.

Ensuring Local Involvement through Compliance with PEC Bylaws: In order to secure 70% quota for local engineers and professionals as envisaged in the bylaws of Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) must be implemented. This will not only create job opportunities for the local engineers and professionals but will also result in skill transfer, and technology integration for sustainability of CPEC on low cost.

Mitigate Bureaucratic Hurdles: The prevailing bureaucratic obstacles within Pakistan's system is one of the root causes to hinder the optimum utilization of opportunities offered by China in terms of CPEC. These bureaucratic obstacles must be relaxed through special legislations.

Address Regionalism and Ethnic Conflicts: Keeping in view the sociological issue of ethnic and cultural diversity in Pakistan, which often undermines national interests, there is need to transcend regionalism and focus on broader national goals to prevent instability, including dealing with separatist ideologies in places like Balochistan and erstwhile FATA.

Providing Platforms for Informative Discourse: In order to provide accurate information regarding CPEC, clear misunderstandings, and promote healthy debate for the project's success, there must be series of interactive sessions in different tiers of the society.

Engaging Youth in Decision-Making: Being an integral part of the society and the future leaders, it is emphasized to involve youth and they should be given opportunities to express their thoughts freely. This engagement will not only lead to innovative solutions and fresh perspectives in national matters but will counter the negative propaganda being made by the external forces.

Recognizing and Respect Different Perspectives: In order to involve different stakeholders to ensure ownership of CPEC, it is important to allow room for various opinions and difference of opinion should be accepted with an open heart.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