

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on track, says envoy

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Beijing: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a mega infrastructure project that is aimed to link Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province to Gwadar deep sea port in Pakistan, has made progress and benefited local people, a Chinese diplomat said.

The completed part of the CPEC project, under China's Belt and Road Initiative, is bringing tangible benefits to local people, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong said in an interview with Xinhua news agency.

Sun said the two countries have launched a host of early harvest projects focusing on energy and transport infrastructure to meet Pakistan's immediate needs.

In the energy sector, 16 projects have been sorted out to be implemented first, which can generate 10.4 million kw of electricity in total, Sun said, adding that half of the projects have been under construction, and will help Pakistan ease its power shortages.

A solar power plant in Punjab province's Bahawalpur city, built by the Chinese company ZTE Energy, has recently installed a 300-megawatt generator unit, which can produce 480 million kWh annually, enough to satisfy the daily power consumption of at least 200,000 Pakistani families, Sun said.

Regarding transportation, the ambassador said, phase II of the Karakoram highway, the Multan-Sukkur section of the Lahore-Karachi highway, and the Pakistan portion of a cross-border optical cable project are already underway.

As the largest transportation project under the CPEC, the 392 km-long Multan-Sukkur stretch is expected to create nearly 10,000 jobs at the peak of its construction, the ambassador added.

According to incomplete statistics, the CPEC projects under construction have employed more than 6,000 Pakistani workers by the end of March, besides the employment indirectly created and driven by the projects, Sun said.

Furthermore, Chinese companies participating in CPEC helped residents in remote areas of Pakistan gain access to clean water, electricity and better transportation.

China's Three Gorges Corporation and Tebian Electric Apparatus have provided generators, solar lights and water purification units to residents in remote regions while China Road and Bridge Corporation has repeatedly helped locals build makeshift bridges and water ducts and taken part in rescue and relief operations.

The China Development Bank, Huawei, China State Construction Engineering Corporation, as well as other Chinese entities, have also sponsored Pakistanis to receive further education in China, donated school buses to Gwadar and set up education funds, which have received wide praise from the local population.

The CPEC, which highlights energy, transport, the Gwadar port and industrial cooperation at the current stage and will seek to expand cooperation to such sectors as finance, science and technology, education, poverty alleviation, and urban planning.

"The CPEC is a mutually-beneficial and win-win cooperation, which will contribute to the prosperity and development of China, Pakistan and the region and the building of a community of shared destiny between the two countries," Sun said.

"We will fully implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of China and Pakistan, and push forward the construction of CPEC to benefit the Chinese and Pakistani peoples," Sun added.

Chinese firms are to invest \$46 billion in the project over six years, including \$33.8 billion in energy projects and \$11.8 billion in infrastructure, as part of an agreement inked by the two sides during a visit by Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to China in 2014.

The CPEC is part of China's transnational "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) initiative, which includes the land-based New Silk Road and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.

China's access to Gwadar, close to the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil shipping lane, could open up an energy and trade corridor from the Gulf across Pakistan to western China.

The CPEC when completed will also give China land access to the Indian Ocean, cutting the nearly 13,000 km sea voyage from Tianjin to the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Malacca and around India, to a mere 2,000 km road journey from Kashgar to Gwadar.

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