

CEPC: PERSPECTIVES FROM GILGIT-BALTISTAN, A CONNECTION BETWEEN CHINA AND PAKISTAN

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***Abstract:** This paper takes into account the local perception of "development," which in accordance to CPEC is synonymous with the building of roads and infrastructure. The term "local" denotes that how the popular wisdom in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) translates the meaning of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and how do the people make sense of this mega project – essentially a subaltern perspective on "development." The researchers aim to evaluate how the local perception of development is different from the state-led, positivist version of building corridors and infrastructure. The research also takes into account the ambivalences arising out of social migration and increasing cross-cultural contact between people. By assessing these popular perceptions, the researchers try to fill an important research gap in the available literature which is otherwise dominated by the mainstream discourse related to CPEC—the one which paints the project as the savior and panacea for the ills of the country (i.e., Pakistan). Apart from secondary sources, primary sources of different style like open ended interviews have been used to have an insight of the topic's understanding. As the topic is new and sufficient materials have not been available, therefore, newspapers and articles were the main sources to gather information. GB became very important because it connects China and Pakistan for a joint project of huge, economic, social,*

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political and strategic value, and still it is not part of Pakistan's federation constitutionally like other parts of Pakistan and is considered as a disputed area between Pakistan and India.

Keywords: CPEC, Gilgit-Baltistan, social migration, subaltern, cross-cultural contact, state subject rule.

Introduction

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor envisions regional connectivity by harnessing trade, development, and territorial linkages, primarily among China, Pakistan, and the landlocked countries of Central Asia. The project is touted to be a win-win model for both China and Pakistan as it would bring improved road linkages, rail connection, air transportation system, and more importantly a panacea for Pakistan's fledgling energy sector. The project is considered to be a step forward for "economic regionalization," much different from the popular experiments of regionalization that have been carried out in the post-cold war period. The potential areas of cooperation through CPEC seems numerous, and work on few of the projects has taken a fast pace. The areas include transport infrastructure, energy zones in various locations of Pakistan, trade, commerce and cross-cultural contact through academic and people to people interaction. The consolidation of the model; however, relies heavily on the long-term peace and stability of the region which is otherwise infested by militancy, extremism, poverty, and low standards of living. The mainstream narrative about CPEC is primarily shaped by the state institutions which are further given oxygen by the independent think tanks and policy institutes. This narrative has been further trickled down through the popular media. A subaltern perspective related to CPEC is still missing in the extant literature which primarily relies on the information coming from the top echelons of power. This study sheds light on the significance of GB as an important link between Pakistan and China, and perceptions of the people about CPEC on which less has been discussed and written. It is imperative for smooth sailing of this multibillion dollar project that how GB and its people are taken along.

Status and Political Position of GB

As an internationally disputed territory, GB has remained on the fringes of constitutional and political developments that happened in Pakistan. It remained a subject of ad-hoc mechanisms of governance suited to Pakistan's national and international interests, particularly its stance on the Indian occupied Kashmir (IoK). The most important development with regards to the constitutional and political status of the region was the "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Ordinance 2009." This reform package was introduced by Pakistan People's party which came into power after a long hiatus of military dictatorship imposed by General Pervaiz Musharraf. The reform package is considered to be the most advanced in comparison with the previous models of governance in the region. It tried to give semblance to the political structure of the region by introducing a permanent legislature to be elected on the basis of adult franchise. It also introduced the office of chief minister and governor— a practice standard for the governance of a province; the former to be elected by the assembly while the later to be appointed by the federal government of Pakistan. The erstwhile "Advisors" in the assembly were titled as "Ministers" and the "Chief Executive" to "Chief Minister." The ordinance also renamed the region from "Northern Areas" to "Gilgit-Baltistan." A move generally appreciated and welcomed by the local people primarily because the areas was confused with the terror-infested FATA and its tourist economy shrunk because of this confusion.¹

However, the Self Governance Ordinance did not resolve the long standing issue of constitutional non-recognition of GB in Pakistan's federal framework. The main criticism on the ordinance stemmed from its legal status (i.e., ordinance.) Legal experts are of the opinion that the ordinance can be revoked at any time by another one until and unless it is approved by the parliament and given the constitutional protection. The second most important aspect of the Governance Ordinance is the establishment of GB Council which is

¹ Zulfikar Ali, Tariq Naqash and Jamil Nagri, "'Almost' Pakistan: Gilgit-Baltistan in a constitutional limbo," *Daily Dawn*, January, 19, 2017.

supposed to serve as upper house. Established under article 33 of Gilgit-Baltistan Self-Governance and Empowerment Ordinance, the GB Council consists of 15 members, 6 of whom are to be elected from Legislative Assembly while the rest are the elected legislators from Pakistani assemblies.² Legislation pertaining to main subjects like mineral, water, and power are the sole jurisdiction of GB council. Critics are of the opinion that the skewed balance of power between GB council and legislative assembly points to the fact the federation did not want to empower the local people. However, the major questions remained the same. Is GB the part of Pakistan and what is its constitutional position in Pakistani federation?

Two important points present a contrary answer to the above question. First, GB does not own any share in National Finance Commission, an institution that disburses the resources and money among the central government and federating units. Second, GB does not have any formal representation in Pakistani parliament. It has no role in electing the prime minister and president of the country while it is kept out of decision-making in most important national questions. Various functionaries of the government have also reiterated time and again that GB is not the part of Pakistan, and it cannot be integrated into Pakistani federation under the current International Law regime.

In the midst of all this constitutional ambiguity, GB became the center of attention in the wake of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The said project is already termed as a ‘Game Changer’ and is regarded as one of the most important matters of public debate in Pakistan. Proponents of the project suggest that it could be a panacea for Pakistan’s fledgling economy in the longer run while critics hold the view that the institutions and local political acumen in GB is not advanced enough to negotiate its interest in the project. There is another similar view that under current arrangement GB is being ignored in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor because all the decision-making is carried out from Islamabad by the federal government, and since there is no representation of local people in the

² Ibid.

decision-making bodies, it is likely that Gilgit-Baltistan will be unable to claim its stake in the project.³

CPEC Perspectives from GB

An important strategic territory from the perspective of CPEC, Gilgit-Baltistan connects both China and Pakistan territorially and has served as an important outpost for regional and international developments historically.⁴ There is opinion of one quarter that in the distribution of projects related to CPEC, Gilgit-Baltistan has not received much of a developmental attention from policy makers. The local population does not seem satisfied with attitude of the federal government. Their concerns stem from the fact that not only they are constitutionally and politically unrecognized in the federation of Pakistan, but have been subjected to the ad-hoc mechanisms of governance ever since its accession with Pakistan in 1947. Some are of the view that the disputed nature of GB internationally has the potential to disrupt the smooth materialization of CPEC projects, which China is carefully observing. It cannot be ruled out that the people of GB do not enjoy the full rights from the federation of Pakistan, and the discontent among people can plunge the region into political instability. The region has witnessed issues related to the social and political instability in the past including sectarian and faith based violence. It is thought that the subversive elements could take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the region and cause hindrance to the smooth materialization of CPEC project.

The dissatisfaction among the local people of GB manifested itself in some protests. Some protests were carried out because of the land acquisitions for CPEC projects undertaken by the government without taking local people in confidence. The provincial wing of Pakistan People's Party led these protests and blocked the main CPEC route for a day. Thousands of protesters joined in for this blockage which points to the fact that common people are not happy over the

³ Afzal Ali Shigri, "No space for G-B on CPEC table," *The Dawn*, January, 11, 2016.

⁴ F.M Hassnain, *Gilgit: The Northern Gate to India* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1978), 55.

circumstances, and they need to be heard.⁵ The members of legislative assembly of GB have also been the part of these protests. The protests demanded from the federation of Pakistan to give a fair share for Gilgit-Baltistan and do away with the taxes that have been imposed on the people.

The rationale of tax imposition without giving the due representation in parliament and other decision making bodies seems inexplicable.

What at least we can be given is an Azad Kashmir like set-up which will ensure the autonomy in our internal decision making and some semblance of political status, thus GB will be able to plead its case for mega projects like CPEC. There are no institutions and legal mechanisms in place where local people could question and make those accountable, lest they infringe on our interests. This keeps the field wide open for any kind of advancement, be it federal government, corporations or any other actors. Our virgin market and resources thus remain at stake.⁶

The minister of Excise and Taxation of Gilgit-Baltistan shares a somewhat similar discontent about the CPEC and decries the powerlessness of local representatives to do something about it. The politicians who have made their way to legislative assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan are largely illiterate about the project of CPEC. Most of them have just earned higher secondary education, and now are acting as the representatives of the people.

The perception of GB has not been given proper attention in CPEC related projects is not without any substantiation. The deputy chief of Chinese Mission in Islamabad shared a series of information

⁵ “GB people go on strike to seek ‘due share’ in CPEC,” *The Dawn*, August 16, 2016.

⁶ Interview with Ahsan (Advocate and Focal Person of Awami Action Committee, Gilgit-Baltistan), January 2, 2017.

related to the distribution of projects in Pakistan. The information reveals that Pakistan's four provinces enjoy a fair share of projects in CPEC while Gilgit-Baltistan is not mentioned in any of the projects. Following a controversy that smaller provinces like Balochistan and KPK are being neglected in this mega scheme, Mr. Zhao Lijan explained the share of projects in CPEC.

According to the Deputy Chief of Chinese Mission in Islamabad, here is the breakup of the projects.

- ✓ Baluchistan 16
- ✓ KPK 8
- ✓ Sindh 13
- ✓ Punjab 12⁷

The provincial government's response is somewhat different from what common people think. Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Hafiz Hafeez ur Rehman is the member of Joint Coordination Committee for the implementation of CPEC. He was present at every platform deciding the matters of CPEC. The minister of Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal personally invited the Chief Minister to attend the joint meeting of Coordination Committee on CPEC on November 28–29, 2016.

Besides GB is getting a specialized economic zone under CPEC, while projects related to the development of tourism and mining are also allocated to Gilgit-Baltistan. Hydal power projects as well as the establishment of a medical and engineering college are also part of package. The perception of Gilgit-Baltistan being neglected in CPEC is baseless. Our government has successfully secured a fair share in the projects related to CPEC. I would only reiterate that opposition parties should come and sit with us and have a dialogue and instead of going on the roads to destabilize this project, I think, we all should join hands to smoothly materialize whatever is in our

⁷ "Details of CPEC Projects by Chinese Embassy," *Pak China News*, October 5, 2016.

hands. We have lagged much enough in past seven decades and now it is the time to correct our mistakes, learn from history and deliver to the people of this region.⁸

For the smooth materialization of CPEC, it is important to be cognizant of what the common people and their leaders wish for. Without taking into account the aspirations and desires of the people, no developmental project could seek its desirable outcome. CPEC has come out to be a game-changer for the economic and social development of the country; therefore, it is necessary that this development should be inclusive; it should be people-led and people-oriented and must take all the stake-holders in confidence including the people of GB.

Migration, Development and Local Community: Assessing the Demographic Changes in Gilgit-Baltistan

In the following section, the researchers take into account the concomitant effects of infrastructural development, particularly the building of roads and its effects on the habitat, social, and cultural life of communities residing in the Gilgit city. It is pertinent to mention that Gilgit city presents a homogenous outlook of social life where other communities from the outskirts and peripheries of Gilgit-Baltistan reside for different purposes. Being capital of the region, it offers job opportunities and urban facilities; thus, accommodating the people from different areas mainly fleeing to escape joblessness and poverty. Urban Gilgit is approximately 11 km strip with an area of 57 kilo meter squares. The strip is further divided by the Indus River; along with which are main settlements of the city. The major language spoken in the region is *Shina* which makes almost forty five percent of the total population.

High mountainous region such as Gilgit-Baltistan was previously isolated from the mainstream Pakistan. It has thus been described as "Ethnographic museums" where culture, values, and

⁸ Interview with Dr Mohammad Iqbal (Minister Works and Construction, Government of Gilgit-Baltistan), August 6, 2016.

traditions remained untainted because of its isolation from the peripheral areas.⁹ The area being situated at the lap of three mighty mountain ranges namely Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindukush has prevented an easy connection with the surrounding plain regions; thus, preserving its own way of life. The terrain being highly mountainous and rugged has proved to be inimical to the mobility and communication among different communities. This strategic isolation was punctured in the wake of construction of Karakoram Highway which was completed in 1978. It opened up the region for an all-weather connection with the rest of Pakistan.

The construction of Karakoram highway made the connection between high and low lands of the country. It has thus proved to be beneficial in terms of providing easy and rapid availability of services and utility. There is a contrary view related to the construction of Karakoram Highway as well. "The Karakoram Highway rather than bringing them the promised benefits resulted in the transformation of Gilgit city to such an extent that it endangered the tranquility of the entire area."¹⁰

The effects of road construction culminated into a large-scale migration within and towards the territory of Gilgit-Baltistan. Due to its historical positioning in the region, the Gilgit city enjoys a relatively high status among its peripheral areas. All the important offices are located in the city, and fifteen different languages are spoken in a territory inhabited by just 0.26 million people.¹¹

The rugged and harsh mountainous territory of the region could not stop the migration from different surrounding areas. In fact migration has been a major feature even before the construction of Karakoram Highway. The major tribes currently present in the city account the arrival of their ancestors from different adjoining areas. The *Qazalbashis* residing in the Gilgit city claim that they have

⁹ Martin Soekfeld, "Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan," *Ethnoscripts*, XVII, (2014): 30.

¹⁰ Afzal A, Shigri, "Land ownership rights," *The Dawn*, April 2, 2017.

¹¹ Martin Soekfeld, "Migration and Society in Gilgit: Northern Areas of Pakistan," *Anthropos* 92, XX, (1997): 83-90.

arrived from Iran and Central Asian regions. There is a major chunk of Kashmiri population in the city whose ancestors are believed to have been migrated from the Kashmir region. While the tribes of *Sheen* and *Yashkun* proudly state that they are the earliest inhabitants of this region. Not all of these migration accounts can be taken as factually correct, but the accounts of local people suggest that the territory had a fair connection with rest of the adjoining areas.

The *Mathulfauo* claim that they are the original inhabitants of this land – the ones who first came here and made the settlements.¹² This does not mean that only the insider perspective is right; rather from it a whole perspective of us and them stems, giving way for the discord between the natives and non-locals. Generally, people from outside are not well received in the region. The insiders that are the local consider themselves as superiors then the outsiders. The outsiders migrated primarily because they could not provide a decent life to their families, or they were expelled from the other lands, thus; they became nomads and came to live in other regions. But in the course of years, this distinction between the outsiders and insiders has changed. The locals, once powerful and rich, have been reduced in terms of their class and privilege. Local wisdom suggests the example of current government in GB which is headed by a Chief Minister who is an “outsider”– the one who migrated from Kashmir and proudly states his Kashmiri descent. The change took place because of social and political processes.

The construction of Karakoram Highway though has accelerated the links but has not been able to reduce the social gaps between different communities residing in Gilgit. One of its relevant examples is the social ostracizing of Pashtun community living in Gilgit. The Pashtuns have mostly migrated from the adjoining areas of Kohistan and Dir. Initially these migrants came for business and job purposes; however, they could not settle properly in the region. Thus, the local community considered them as “*BaeKhandani*”, a

¹² Mathulfauo: A combination of two Shina words: "Mathulo" means the humid clay stone, and "Fauo" means to make something. The word denotes the people who are original inhabitants of the land and the one who have made the land of Gilgit arable.

local slang for the people without families. The increased means of road communication could not translate into assimilation as inter-marriages between these communities are still rare. Therefore, a mutual suspicion is very much there between the duos. The migrants could not integrate with the local communities because of social stereotypes that were hurled at them. These stereotypes vary from social degradation to outright abuse sometimes.

The loss on control of social migration has rendered the local population into downright fear. Ever since the buying and selling of land came into vogue, lots of outsiders came to Gilgit; thus, ousting the local populations from their earlier privileged position. The locals view the outsiders as people who are threat to the social order, and that they are the ones who cannot be controlled; thus, the most suitable tool is to reduce social contact with them.

The changes brought about by the construction of road networks in northern areas of Pakistan were quite visible. Besides providing an integrated framework of communication, the road building served an important purpose of bringing communities together. This contact was not always positive in the sense that it sometimes led to social conflict. One of its examples is that in the violent sectarian clashes, erupted in 2005, most of the private business like shops, and shopping plazas were burned down because most of it belonged to Pashtun community which commands a fair share of private business in Gilgit city. It is sometimes alleged by the local community that the non-locals have taken over the business opportunities in Gilgit; thus, increasing the locals' dependence on them. The building of road also intensified the trickle down of social values from other adjoining areas of Gilgit. Today, the Gilgit town hosts a lot of different communities, their language and varying dialects, and accommodates their distinct way of life. This multiculturalism is given boost by the arrival of modern ways of life from the south of the country. The introduction of mobile phone, a quite recent development has altered the traditional conceptions of living. The notion of individual privacy gained a fair momentum in a society which was traditionally collectivist. Most of the informal social institutions have dried up. For instance the traditional gathering, popularly known as *Chalay* has disappeared, at least from the suburbs of Gilgit. The *Chalay* was a social gathering of elders in each

Mohallah (settlement) where the elders usually used to gather during night and discussing the most important issues of the local settlement. Folk stories, legends, and past were discussed in these settings. Each settlement had a special person nominated for story-telling who had a mastery over the art of public speaking and rhetoric. These practices have now dried up, and one of the most important factors was the introduction of television in these remote areas.

Television altered the lives of our communities. It is responsible for diminishing our social practices like *Chalay*. People no longer feel the need to sit together, discuss and interact among themselves because for them the television apparently serves this purpose. This flow of knowledge and information apparently has a positive aspect attached to it. But it has done harm as well, you see, I am not a regressive person, but you have to realize that introduction of market and commodities in this part of the world has greatly altered its social contours and, therefore, we look back to our past nostalgically, but I think this was how it meant to be. You cannot lament it every time.¹³

Modernity and technological development coupled with some of the grave political events in GB. An erstwhile strategically isolated territory, Gilgit-Baltistan remained largely on the fringes of mainstream political activity of Pakistan. Governed through ad-hoc ordinances and presidential orders from time to time, the territory remained politically deactivated when it came to choose its own representatives. This task was primarily carried out in the past by Political Agent, and these days, it is believed that most of the decision making largely rests with the powerful, "steel-frame bureaucracy." It is pertinent to add that GB has seen a style of political governance that once the British administration carried out in colonial India.

¹³ Interview with Muhammad Amin Zia (A writer, poet, and historiographer), January 2, 2017.

It seems that Pakistan's leadership wants to politically train the people of Gilgit-Baltistan before granting them any substantial political setup. Just as the British administration introduced constitutional and political reforms gradually; we can witness that in GB. From time to time, GB has been experimented with different electoral and political experiments, and gradually people are getting along with it. The current set-up in my opinion is the most advanced one, virtually matching with the modern-style of political governance. Before that the most advanced reforms were introduced by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which abolished the traditional system of kingship and *Rajgiri*, and reformed the region on the modern styles by integrating it in the form of different districts. This was a major development, because it set out the future sociological and political pattern of Gilgit-Baltistan.¹⁴

The patterns of migration and mass mobilization towards GB were impacted by the reforms that were initiated by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1974. Among other reforms, one of the important political developments was the abolishment of State Subject Rule. This rule was instrumental in preventing any kind of demographic change in GB till its abolishment. It is towards this issue that we now turn our attention.

State Subject Rule: Origins, Development and Consequences

The State Subject Rule (SSR) was a preventive legislation carried out in 1927 by the government of then *Maharaja* Hari Singh. The legislation barred the people from outside to buy lands and property; thus, effectively stopping any kind of foreign encroachment on the lands of local people. The legislation was carried out to maintain stability and peace in the then Gilgit agency which was under the control of government of Jammu and Kashmir. The then

¹⁴ Interview with Nawaz Khan Naji (Member Legislative Assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan), July 20, 2016.

Kashmiri administration adopted very strict measures to prevent the inflow of foreign people to Gilgit. Check posts were established at every entry and exit point so that the unnecessary arrival of the people could be controlled. People from outside were only partially allowed after a strict scrutiny to only visit the *bazaar* in Gilgit and spend the night in hostels outside the city. These effective measures were taken because the control of Kashmir's government was challenged several times in the area from different directions. "Some of these attacks even succeeded in expelling the Kashmiri administration and garrison."¹⁵ Out of this fear of losing control of the territory, the region was subjected to such kind of regulations.

Since the dawn of 20th century, Gilgit became a blue-eyed territory of foreign investors and businessmen. With its flourishing bazaar and labor market and un-irrigated lands, it became a hotly contested territory for investment. This transformation of social space and infrastructure took place apparently after the arrival and expansion of British in the town.¹⁶ The patterns of migration to Gilgit took different shapes at different junctures in the history. After the principalities of Hunza fell into hands of the British, the people of Hunza started to come to the main city. The British were not opposed to the migration of Hunza from north, primarily because the Hunzukutz were regarded as reliable and hard-working people. Both British and Kashmiri administration were on the same page regarding the mobility of the people from southern regions like Darel, Kohistan and Chilas. The British and Kashmiri administration was suspicious and considered that these areas troubling for the stability and peace in Gilgit. Thus, both tried to prevent the mobility of people to Gilgit

¹⁵ Fredric Drew, *The Jammu and Kashmir territories*, (Karachi, Indus publications, 1980), 230.

¹⁶ A clarification is necessary about the actual administration of Gilgit city in the later part of 19th century. The British had control of the region because office of political agent was established in the town. But sub-district of the town, which is city itself, was under the control of governor of Kashmir wazarat. This double control of the region roused complications until the British took the whole area on lease in 1935 from Kashmiri administration.

from southern side.¹⁷ The control of both the powers (Kashmir and Britain) set the migration patterns into Gilgit and was helped in accordingly.

State Subject Rule (SSR) after 1947

In 1972, populist Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto initiated wide-ranging reforms in the amputated country. The new constitution of 1973 was introduced which was largely a consensual document of all the political parties. It is worth mentioning that neither the constitutions before 1973 nor the 1973 constitution itself defines Gilgit-Baltistan as its territory. The spree of reforms initiated by government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto trickled down to Gilgit-Baltistan which was erstwhile constituted by independent principalities and autonomous states. After visit to the area, Prime Minister Z.A Bhutto promptly ordered to abolish the system of princely states, and one unit was carved out of all the area consisting of seven districts.¹⁸ With the introduction of new system, all the indigenously prevalent laws like that of State Subject Rule were done away with. The reforms were initially welcomed by the local populace who were given the right to elect their representatives on the basis of adult franchise rather than remaining subjects to a single ruling family. A new council was established known as Northern Areas advisory council which had 18 members. These members were to be selected on the basis of adult franchise.

Consequences of abolishing State Subject Rule in Gilgit-Baltistan:

The abolishment of SSR in Gilgit-Baltistan completely altered the patterns of migration in the region. An erstwhile homogenous area with only native people, the abolishment of SSR provided the opportunity for non-locals to migrate into the region. It is important to mention that the abolishment of SSR was in complete

¹⁷ Robert A. Huttenback , “Gulab Singh and the Creation of the Dogra State of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 20, 477 – 488.

¹⁸ Ali et al., "'Almost' Pakistan: Gilgit Baltistan."

contravention to the resolutions of United Nations on Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. The State of Jammu and Kashmir is still under State Subject Rule. No person other than the native Kashmiri is allowed to buy or sell lands and property in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. There is one opinion that by abolishing State Subject Rule Pakistan did not only violate the United Nation's resolution and paved the way for a massive migration from other parts of Pakistan to Gilgit-Baltistan. One of the explanations that are given as a reason for abolishing State Subject Rule is that according to UN resolutions on Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, both India and Pakistan are supposed to carry out plebiscite whenever the conditions are favorable. Pakistan in hope to maximize its vote in the plebiscite abolished the SSR while the UN resolutions stress both India and Pakistan not to change the demography of the both the regions.

The SSR ensures that both India and Pakistan do not change the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of Gilgit-Baltistan and occupied Kashmir. It is like a shield that protects the interests and ensures that local people are empowered. The violation of this law by Pakistan in GB has no basis at all, and the law should still be applied in its spirit as suggested by UNCIP resolutions. The importance of SSR has grown in the recent times as CPEC is in full swing. The SSR protects the rights of local people over commerce and resources. It helps in preserving the identity of local people who are otherwise constitutionally deprived in broader Pakistani federal framework.

Another view about the abolition of SSR is associated with the regional political developments that occurred in the decade of 1970's. The Iranian revolution and its subsequent impact on larger geo-politics of the region were propounded so much that its trickledown effect was felt in Gilgit-Baltistan. It is believed that the state of Pakistan feared the consequences of having a Shiite dominated province while revolution-hit Iran silently trying to spread its fangs around the region. This provoked a change in policy of Pakistan towards Gilgit-Baltistan as the state was now eager more

than ever to equalize the Shia-Sunni gap in the region, and thus it paved way for a large scale Sunni migration towards the region.¹⁹

Calls for Re-enactment of State Subject Rule

The issue of SSR has assumed a lot of importance in the wake of recent events, particularly after CPEC. Under the garb of developmental projects, the government of Pakistan is whisking away the lands of local people without any proper compensation. The issue has incited a lot of public attention in recent days as lands are being taken away from local people. For the commercial projects related to CPEC, the government has acquired 0.5 million Kanals of land, and, for security purposes, it has acquired 12,000 Kanals, and the figures are increasing.²⁰ The leading opposition, Pakistan People's Party staged a protest and blocked the Karakoram Highway in October 2016 to raise the issue and demanded for the compensation of lands that were taken away from the local people. The agitations are the part of continuum that seeks to reinforce the historical State Subject Rule. It is important to note that there is a fear among local populace about being reduced to minority in their own land which does not seems a good omen for the stability and vitality of CPEC. "It is observed that the government has been trying to take over the land in question without due compensation for the community which has the rights to this common land."²¹ Nautor Act is a black law; "PPP demands revocation of the Nautor Act to ensure protection of rights of land ownership by indigenous people."²² In the view of present situation, it is important for the government to pay proper compensations to the people whose lands are taken away by the government. The non-provision of compensations could lead to

¹⁹ Senge Hassan Sering, "Constitutional Impasse in Gilgit-Baltistan: The fallout," *Strategic Analysis* 34, no.3 (2011): 354.

²⁰ Khadija Zahid, "Fate of Gilgit-Baltistan under CPEC," *Pakistan Today*, April 2, 2017.

²¹ Afzal A, Shigri, "Land ownership rights," *The Dawn*, April 2, 2017.

²² Khadija Zahid, "Fate of Gilgit-Baltistan under CPEC," *Pakistan Today*, April 2, 2017.

annoyance and frustration among the people which would not be useful for CPEC project.

Conclusion

The importance of CPEC for the long-term economic stability of Pakistan cannot be underemphasized. The project has the capability to transform national fortune and give it a stable path for the country's economy if it comes to fruition while taking all the stakeholders along. No policy or developmental program has received as much acclaim and attention as CPEC did. The civilian military and political elite do not seem to be overlooking the importance of the opportunity which has emerged at a time when Pakistan is grappling with issues of poverty, social inequality and fledgling economy. The project reflects the trustworthy bilateral relationship that both China and Pakistan has enjoyed over the years. Apart from being an economic initiative experts have described CPEC as a strategic gambit that aims to bring the erstwhile least connected territories of South and Central Asian region to Chinese territorial outreach. This will also enhance China's access to the regions which were formerly least connected or were out of China's market ambit. The main concern regarding fruition of the project is Pakistan's internal social and political stability, and that how all the stakeholders take part in translating it into their greater advantage.

The construction of highways, railway, and other modes of connectivity that are part of CPEC project can well be understood in the larger spectrum of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) policy. The initiative calls for the state directed investment to build roads, highways, and other forms of communication to deepen the regional and economic integration in the South and larger Asian region. This will ultimately result in the inter-continental integration with Europe and beyond. Pakistan is an important entity in the larger OBOR nexus because of the historical silk route link. Pakistan will be an important partner because the construction of CPEC will quell China's long-standing dilemma of passing its imports and exports through the Malacca strait where roughly eighty percent of its oil imports travel

through the single chokepoint of the Strait of Malacca.²³ In this context, the less developed part of China's Western region including Xingjian province has assumed immense importance, and in order to quell the extremist movements; China has already accelerated its developmental programs in the province. China's attempt for economic development and investment can also be viewed through its tacit effort to counter extremists not only in its Western Xingjian province but in the whole spectrum of CPEC. The developmental initiatives that are part of CPEC are thought as an antidote to the rising extremism and poverty in Pakistan as well. The job creation through the initiative will counter the anti-state sentiment, thereby, improving the law and order situation in the country.

Based on findings of this research, below are some of the concluding thoughts that how CPEC can be an effective project, and that what measures are needed to do away with concerns of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan that have emerged in the recent times.

The effective implementation of CPEC will ultimately depend on how Pakistan addresses its issues including terrorism, provincial disharmony, and the rising tide of geostrategic opposition including the Indian factor. The single most important problem that Pakistan needs to resolve immediately is the provincial disharmony over the distribution and allocation of projects in CPEC. Based upon the interviews that the researchers have conducted as a part of this research, the logical conclusion is to immediately consult the stakeholders of GB, to take them into confidence in decision making, and to address their grievances without delay.

GB should be given participation in parliament, National Finance Commission, and Council of Common Interests. The participation in these higher echelons of power would set GB on a new trajectory of political journey which would eventually have long-standing ramifications on its social and economic sector. Giving better political status to the territory would give a sense of empowerment to the people of GB and will foster a sense of unity

²³ Daniel S Markey and James West, "Behind China's Gambit in Pakistan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, May, 12, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/behind-chinas-gambit-pakistan/p37855>.

and national integration which is important for the projects like CPEC. The political empowerment will bring the region at par with other areas of rest of country and will enable them to plead their cases on national forums. The absence of representation in Pakistan's parliament has generated a skeptical response from people of the region over the years. Their political deprivation is being viewed from the perspective of colonial extension of rule which among other things has been used by anti-state elements to further their agenda in the region. At a juncture when the investment related to CPEC is coming in as fresh air for Pakistan, it is timely and much needed that the concerns of GB should be addressed, and the region should be integrated with the country's constitutional and political framework.

The absence of political rights and constitutional recognition has neither served the interest of Pakistan nor GB. Without proper institutional frameworks, capacitated with the protection of local interest, the introduction of projects like CPEC will bring sweeping distortions of fair and free economic competition.²⁴ Such a scenario will give strength to the perception that CPEC is a tool of exploitation for the resources like mining and gemstones which are abundantly found in the region. The grant of mining contracts to non-local firms in recent times was also met with criticism. Moreover, the issue of land grabbing for CPEC projects without due compensation for the affected people is also causing a lot of concerns. Thus, protests and demonstrations for compensations can mar the smooth functioning of CPEC and Karakoram highway. In a more nuanced form, political development should precede economic development in GB because the establishment of political and legal reforms would ensure that local interests are not sacrificed under some fictional national or international interest.

²⁴ Seigfried O' Wolf, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its impact on Gilgit-Baltistan," *South Asia Democratic Forum*, Issue no 25, (2015): 47.