

Statement at the Plenary by His Excellency Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

May 14, 2017

**Excellency Mr. Zhang Gaoli,
Distinguished world leaders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate China for hosting this spectacular “Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” and for choosing a very apt theme for this Summit: “Cooperation for Common Prosperity”.

This is a historic event. It will build critical pathways in the years to come for economic and financial cooperation, business-to-business collaboration, and people-to-people contacts.

I am here today to celebrate the remarkable success of the seminal initiative of the “One Belt, One Road”, shoulder to shoulder with our close friend and trusted ally, China, and the other world leaders present here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I pay to President Xi and the Chinese leadership, my deepest tributes for their dynamic and creative leadership. We admire and commend China’s vision and ingenuity in developing corridors across regions; in building supportive financial institutions such as the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; and above all, in launching China Railway Express trains that construct a new bridge on the Eurasian landmass.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“One Belt-One Road” is an inter-continental mega-project that integrates infrastructure, energy, trade, telecommunications, investment and industrial development. Such a broad sweep and scale of interlocking economic partnerships and investments is unprecedented in history. We stand at the cusp of a geo-economic revolution. In fact, this is the dawn of a truly new era of synergetic intercontinental cooperation.

OBOR embraces three continents - Asia, Africa and Europe. It covers half of the world population, half of its resources, and 65 countries. International investors from all over are pouring their resources into it. It makes win-win partnerships possible for all. It will accelerate economic growth in developing countries; yield dividends for international investors; and tear down barriers to trade and commerce.

Even more importantly, it will help repair and reform global economic governance.

We do not see OBOR merely as a modern revival of the ancient Silk Road. Rather, we view it as a conscious and humanistic endeavour to take humankind to a higher level of prosperity, peace and stability through connectivity and close contact.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace and development go hand in hand, and nothing can pave the path for peace and security more than economic development achieved through regional collaboration. OBOR signifies that geo-economics must take precedence over geo-politics, and that the centre of gravity should shift from conflict to cooperation.

As OBOR unfolds across continents, we see it fostering inclusion, creating tolerance, and promoting acceptance of cultural diversity. We see it as a powerful tool for overcoming terrorism and extremism.

Pakistan believes that the most powerful impact of OBOR will be on the lives of poor and marginalised people, who would have higher incomes, better education and more health facilities. It would help in eradicating poverty and achieving Sustainable Development, leaving no one behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a core project of OBOR. In fact, it has been rightly called its flagship because it aims to connect the neighbourhoods of East and West Asia. CPEC makes Pakistan both a conduit and destination for cross-regional investment and trade.

Let me make it very clear that CPEC is an economic undertaking open to all countries in the region. It has no geographical boundaries. It must not be politicised. In implementing this Corridor, we are not striving to merely leverage geography for economic prosperity, we are also trying to build a peaceful, connected and caring neighbourhood. It is time we transcend our differences, resolve conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy, and leave a legacy of peace for future generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with a sense of pride that I avail this opportunity to inform this forum that our infrastructure, energy and industrial projects are moving just as envisaged. Many will be completed by or even before their timelines. Unprecedented economic, social and cultural benefits will accrue from the CPEC – not just for the people of Pakistan, but also for the people of the entire region.

Through a resolute will and sound planning, as well as the steadfast support of our Chinese friends, we have shaped an enabling environment for the CPEC to take off. It is producing new entrepreneurs, creating new jobs and businesses, and attracting international investment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The CPEC is a project owned and nurtured by all citizens of Pakistan. It is also fully compatible with our own Vision 2025, which invests our resources in multiple corridors of regional cooperation, including energy, industry, trade and transportation. In pursuance of this vision, we are also bridging the gap between economic growth and social development by focusing on poverty alleviation, education, health, and gender mainstreaming. We would tap the full potential of our youth, who constitute more than 60 per cent of our population.

What is more, our economy is doing very well. Macroeconomic indicators are stable; the economic outlook is bright; our growth rate is rising; and the Pakistan Stock Exchange is one of the five best performing stock exchanges in the world.

Today, I present to you a rising, confident and secure Pakistan – a Pakistan that is now increasingly perceived as a turnaround story, and a winner. It is now an emerging economy, with even greater capacity to absorb new investments and equities.

Before I conclude, I must emphasise that OBOR has gained wide traction. It negates the logic of polarisation and rejects the encirclement of any country. It is about connectivity. It is about emancipation. It moves us out of silos into shared space. The fact is that now OBOR belongs to us all – those who are participating in it and those who are not as yet.

OBOR has truly become a global commons. Let us sustain it with full vigour and robust political will. Let OBOR become a metaphor for a new, mature, resilient and cooperative world. We all must keep alive the spirit of “One Belt One Road.”

With this, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you all.