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Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port in Central Asia

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Keywords	Abstract
Geo	The paper evaluates the geostrategic importance of Gwadar, the expectation
Strategic,	of an economic corridor, the opportunities for industrial development, and
Gwadar	the economic benefits via Gwadar Port. Gwadar is not only going to play an
Port,	important role in Pakistan's economy, but it is also likely to influence other
China,	neighbouring countries in the region, like China, Afghanistan, Central Asia,
Afghanistan,	Russia, Iran, etc. The forecast trade of Gwadar port is based on the transit
Central	potential of cargo activities to Western areas of China. Central Asia and
Asia,	Afghanistan, in addition to the flow of natural resources from Central Asian
Russia, Iran,	Republics, cargo transshipment and the domestic cargo import and export
Pakistan.	activities. In the near future competition of the regional ports within different
	levels will also be examined. Pakistan is seen as a window of strategic
	opportunity for the regional trade. The throbbing economy of China may be
	demanding more than the supply line. Central Asian natural resources to the
	south are considered to gravitate to Pakistan. Pakistan presents a very
	important corridor of the Indian Ocean and Gulf to Central Asia. Pakistan
	requires addressing all the concerns and issues to develop Gwadar as a
	regional energy corridor. Gwadar Port has great trade value, and it is of
	growing importance to Pakistan in the region. The study is based on
	secondary sources and primary data collected through different types of
	articles published in different journals, both economic/business, minutes of
	meetings, news sources, internet sources, and many previous articles based
	on that framework, which provides better understanding to the readers and
	subject also.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's demography, geography and strategic technology make for a very good combination. The development of infrastructure in South and West Asia is for the competition to get geographical control by regional powers to secure and enhance markets and resources. The Indian Ocean enhances strategic competition between the nations because of its geographical importance. The ocean is also one of Nicholas Spykman's maritime highways of the world. On the other side, the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf have no clear balance of power while the U.S.A. has been reducing its military capabilities in the region. This ongoing competition has positive and negative consequences.

Pakistan's demography, geography and strategic technology have a very good combination. Currently, two ports are being developed in the region. Gwadar port in Pakistan and Chabahar in Iran have strategic alliances between Pakistan and China and between Iran and India, respectively (Daniels, 2013).

Gateway to Central Asia: Central Asia, or the central region of Asia, is bounded on the north by Russia and on the south by Afghanistan, Iran and China. It extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the border of western China in the east. These states are former Soviet republics: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. The history of relations of the subcontinent with Central Asia dates back to the prehistoric past when various trade routes connected the two regions, and, at times, they were part of the same states. The historical heritage of Central Asia surely ranks as one of the most powerful economic centers in the region. The new trends in regional and international markets offer initiatives for Pakistan, especially in Central Asia, but the significance of ties between Pakistan and Central Asia has always been strong, mainly because of religious, cultural and commercial bonds (Asif, 2011). The independent states of Central Asia have strong religious, cultural and economic relations with countries of South Asia, especially Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. Central Asian states are very rich in natural resources as well as human resources but not good in economic conditions. Geographical location is the major reason behind its poor economic condition. All Central Asian countries are landlocked, and all states do not have the opportunity to access the outer world to boost their economy by utilizing sources. Pakistan has a very good geographical location, having well-developed ports and a coastal area spread over thousands of miles. Pakistan can provide the shortest route to all landlocked countries of Central Asia. Now Pakistan is becoming a gateway for the people of Central Asia. It will help increase foreign investment in the country besides enhancing the trade of goods, energy pipelines, railways and transmission lines within the region. While Central Asian States land significance in the minds of all geostrategy thinkers, recent strategic development at Gwadar is a unique decision. The big landmass of Central Eurasia, Afghanistan, Southern Russia and southwest China are joining at Gwadar (Hamid, 2013). This is based on geography, history, demography and economy. In a twist of irony, Pakistan, which countered the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, should now activate its transit, trade and investment on its deep-sea port of Gwadar.

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the smaller states. Kazakhstan is the bigger state in the North. Southern Russia is just located in the north of Central Asia; the line of many cities like Moscow, Irkutsk, Omsk and Kyrgyz lies in Southern Siberia, bounded in the east by Chinese Xingjian. Central Asia is rich in natural resources but not good in material wealth. Russia is retaining influence in CARS, and China has also been enhancing its influence. Energy pipelines and trade transit need outlets from that vast landlocked landmass. Russia is also a big energy player in this region (Ghaleb, 2011). The East-West Corridor was also appreciated; it would be needed in time between Iran and Pakistan. A feasibility study of these projects was undertaken by the Asian Development Bank. Once developed, the connection with Central Asian States could be extended to Moscow.

Statement of Problem

The geostrategic environment is considered as one of the important elements that influences the development of a society. The location of Pakistan in a region which has great economic, political and strategic significance will definitely play a role in the prosperity of the country. Gwadar is strategically located at the crossroads of natural resources of CARs and the Middle East. Gwadar is on the shortest route to the western parts of the Chinese region. It is equipped with facilities for modern cargo handling to meet the new challenges of growing global trading activities. Economically boosting China, stabilising Pakistan and gradually opening new consumer markets of CARs will create a substantial portion of global

trade in the near future. The area of Gwadar is facing provocations which can be local, regional and beyond the region, as it is an excellent project with long- and short-term local and regional impact.

Objectives

- 1. To evaluate whether Gwadar has the potential to be a regional hub and trans-shipment port to China and Central Asia.
- 2. To examine the dominant position of Gwadar for the Gulf region as a part of a great game.

METHOD

The paper is based on secondary sources and primary data collected through different types of articles published in different journals, both economic/business, minutes of meetings, news sources, internet sources, and many previous articles based on that framework, which provides better understanding to the readers and subject also.

One more reason for using that method of research in the case of the deep-sea Gwadar port is because of some elements in this case scenario, some being confirmed about a particular area. Researchers of social sciences experience two types of research: one is the deductive approach, and the other one is the inductive approach. Because this is a qualitative case study in this paper, the inductive approach is implemented in the qualitative study, which is based on findings and observation.

De Riencourt (1982) has written about the strategic position of Balochistan. In recent times Hamid Hasan has written about Gwadar port's significance and its implications. Most of the research was done before the actual start of the project, which does not suggest trends or indicators since most of the results would have been theoretical and hypothetical with sufficient precision. In addition, due to the lack of availability of data and other facts, much research is qualitative. There are a lot of numbers and relevant data to quantify the attributes of the harbor or provide a conclusion on the decent level of success or failure. A serious lack of availability of information on all navigation data and all related costs, fees or relevant variables is missing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is always considered the most important part of research work. It is an evaluation of reading, analyzing, evaluating and summarizing the relevant material to one's selected area of topic. It proves helpful for saving time and money. A literature review should be a theoretical base that helps you identify the nature and area of research. The major focus of my study in hand is to evaluate and find out the significance of Gwadar Port and how this port becomes the new economic hub for the regional level.

Most of the available material discusses the Chinese energy supply through Gwadar as well as Central Asia, Iran, etc. Researchers are ignoring the domestic progress in Balochistan and Western China. One more thing I do not see in different papers is the hurdles of the project being faced by the government of Pakistan. Researchers are focusing on the Sino-Pak economic alliance.

The literature on the coverage of Pakistan, China, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Iran, and other stakeholders includes a plethora of information and research. After deep study, I found that the study of international relations by the researchers and scholars is the combination of two disciplines: international relations and political science. The study discusses how Gwadar has mass strategies for the economy. It is not only for the particular region but also for Central Asia as well as Africa and Eurasia, which is the entrance to the Persian Gulf. It is estimated that 40% of world oil trade is passing from that route. The Chinese economic alliance with Pakistan is the center point of the study. According to Walt (1989), alliances are very important and play a central role in theories of international relations; alliances are seen as an integral part of statecraft. Alliances are important research work in theories of international relations. Description of alliance as a process of statecraft of international organizations (Fedder, 1980). According to Lipson (The evolution of cooperation, 1984), the political economy of international affairs is renowned not only for its important focus but also for its consideration of cooperation, these collective understandings being explained as the world economy by Krasner (1983).

Bhatti et al. (2020), while discussing Gawadar port, stated that a few years before that, the Pakistani government decided to develop the new port of Gwadar with the help of neighboring country China. Gwadar is a pearl of geography. The coastal development project of Gwadar was conceived in the year 2000. The further study of Bhatti et al. reveals that the concept of Gwadar port was announced for the better future of Pakistan. Gwadar has the potential to change the scenario of the economic, political, and strategic elements of the region that will convert Pakistan into a multi-regional state actor. This is the transit route to Central Asia through Afghanistan, China and the states of the Gulf region. The Strait of Hormuz is 400 km away from Gwadar Port, which is the important gateway of the oil route. The new global concept based on share of peace, shared wealth, and shared globalism in Gwadar will help in all aspects. Qaiser and Shahdan (2013) say that the Government of Pakistan's decision to develop a small fishing village into an international trade route and hub also refers to underdeveloped regions to bring economic growth and regional development. Mir (2013), while presenting the last decade, writes that the world has become more globalized in terms of sharing relationships. Countries are designing different strategies to secure their economic interest.

Its northern high mountains are called Mackinder's Heartland. Sir Halford Mackinder gave that concept in 1905, and its southern coastline is Rimland by Spykeman. It's all about global dominance. Heartland was attached to the littoral lands of Rimland that were more difficult to globalise. We see on the global chessboard the global powers are the original players of this game. Ports' contributions and the input-output model are used in quantitative methods. Khan (2005) analysed the strategic importance of Gwadar port, which is located at the natural resources of the CARs and the Middle East, and it is also the shortest route to the southern province of China. Civilizations have always developed and emerged on the coasts of oceans and seas. Khan says the importance and the role of the coastline in the development of human beings cannot be overemphasized; the majority of the populations of the world are located within 100 km of the shores of the seas. Seaport plays a very important role in giving strength to the national economy and contributing towards the success of the nation.

Anwar's (2010) study revealed that in the modern world geographical environment is considered the most important element and is also influencing human society. Just like a railway junction, Gwadar port will serve as a sea junction for multi-sea routes. Mutual relations of both the countries will depend on the new economic corridor from Gwadar to

Xinjiang. Ahmad (2013), discussing Pakistan's issue of facing the massive lack of energy, stresses that the new route will help the energy transportation and trade activities. This discussion is about the significance of Gwadar Port and Kashgar City.

The part of western China is underdeveloped and landlocked, relative to the geographical position of Pakistan. An important reason for the relationship between the two countries is the strategic partnership. Pakistan needed the foreign investment from China, the development of basic infrastructure, regional trade, transit revenues, energy transit, and employment opportunities at the local level. Iran, Pakistan and Kashgar proposed gas and oil pipelines generate revenues and employment and also solve Pakistan's energy crises. Ahmad further discussing that Gwadar to Kashgar proposed rail line between the two countries. Gwadar port will serve Tajikistan and Uzbekistan through Afghanistan; that was the initial plan due to geographical position. Now Kashgar is connected to Gwadar via roads. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan will also serve through Gwadar. Gwadar needs Pakistan to develop the port as soon as possible. Next to the mouth of the gulf in the Arabian Sea is the largest province in terms of size, Machkinder's Rimland (Malik, 2012). Exploiting Balochistan is part of the new great game by the international colonial powers, viz., the killing of Chinese engineers, the Durand Line issue, "Greater Balochistan", helping rebellious movements, and terrorism.

CGPS (2014) analyzing Chinese interest, found that President Xi Jinping announced the beginning of new relations in the region, the Central Asian past at Astana, Kazakhstan, and a massive Chinese economy demanding more energy. The government of China is working on an energy plan to meet the solution of the future. The Myanmar-to-China pipeline and Kazakhstan-to-China – these are the new energy projects. Railway lines and roads are developing infrastructure with Pakistan, with the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project facing international sanctions. Pakistan's economy and industry are badly affected by the energy crisis. Iqbal (1992), in his research, presented that India decided to build a road in Afghanistan to Tajikistan; that road will pass through Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Sherkhan, and the border and up to China. Iran and Afghanistan developed friendly relations in the Hamid Karzai period. In his opinion, the American attack over Iraq was the start of the first Gulf War. It was said by the many think tanks that it was considered an oil game. Economic development of third-world countries is changing the whole scenario. Pakistan is going to become the new player in the energy game. Pakistan itself needed energy, and the unique location of the coastalline makes Pakistan the cornerstone of the energy game.

Scott (2008) focused on Pakistan's recent role as a 'land corridor' for China and Chinese upgrading of land to the Central Asian countries. In 2004 China and Pakistan held their first joint military exercise on the land of Xinjiang. India is working in Afghanistan in many fields, including road infrastructure, supplying army equipment, and political affiliation with the Hamid Karzai government. Pakistan dislikes the Indian presence in Afghanistan and claims that India is disturbing the Pakistani provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from the Afghan side. The Kashmir issue between both countries is still unresolved, and that is a big cause of tense relations. China is the 3rd silent partner of Kashmir.

i. Theory of Heartland and Rimland: Democratic Ideals and Reality - He wrote the masterpiece in 1919. Halford Mackinder indicated the northern central core and gave the name "Heartland" to that Eurasian landmass, also known as the Pivot Area. It is a landlocked region of central Eurasia. The geographical position of Pakistan is unique. Its mountains of

the north and its proximity to Mackinder's Heartland. Machkinder gave that concept in the early 20th century as the key to world domination. It's a geopolitical region which is populated, well-armed and systemic; powers could bid for world dominance. Heartland is central Europe east of the Baltic and Black seas, to the east of Siberia and Mongolia. Some parts of northeast China and all of Central Asia (Brzezinski, 2007). Mackinder identified that a land empire which controlled the Heartland could use the central geographical position and natural resources to dominate Eurasia and establish a powerful navy that threatened the powers of Japan, England and the United States.

ii. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan and India (TAPI) and Heartland Theory: Balochistan is a great gateway of energy; it is an open fact. The TAPI considered the Turkmenistan-Afghan-Pakistan-India proposed energy pipeline. The TAPI project was examined by former Soviet Russians and the liberation of Central Asian states. Afghanistan was facing insurgency in the Taliban era, so she postponed the project. International energy company Unicol worked for the project to come through (Niazi, 2006).

iii. Central Asian Republics/Russia: The land of fairies and fables lies in Afghanistan's north. The geography is charming and rich in natural resources waiting to be tapped. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the small states in the south; Kazakhstan is a bigger state in the north. In the north of the Central Asian Republics, south of Russia, lies one line of the cities Kazan, Omsk, Moscow, Kyrgyz, and Irkutsk. The Kyrgyz steppe lies on Siberia's south edge, in the east by China's Xingjian. Southwards lie Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Caspian Sea with Baku plus Russia, Turkey and Astrakhan towards the southwest. Central Asia is not good in material wealth but rich in energy resources (Mir, 2013). Russia retained her influence in Central Asia; China also increased its influence. The United States has some vital interests. Brzezinski's stress on Eurasia and CARs has influenced American geopolitics. Energy and trade transit pipelines very much need outside access from their vast landlocked area. Russia is also a big energy player, a conduit to Europe. Iran and the Middle East have huge assets of hydrocarbons and exports of these assets.

The best available route in the South is via Afghanistan to Pakistan's coast. As mentioned, three transit roads and pipelines are available. In Central Asia the major center point, though on the south fringe, runs via Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. This is running from Almaty, Tashkent and Ashgabad. This route travels to Iran. It reaches Chabahar/Bandar Abbas, which is located at the mouth of the Gulf. Secondly, Mai, via the west of Afghanistan, passing via Balochistan, also reaches Gwadar. The third available option for Pakistan's new economic corridor is from Gwadar/Karachi to the north of Pakistan at the Sust border. After crossing into Kashgar in China, it turns into the Central Asian States (Mir, 2013).

The transit routes - two or three of them – operate simultaneously. Pakistan can help Iran, China, Afghanistan and Russia for all three routes. The goods and containers reaching Gwadar would be picked up north to Central Asia. Railways can also be more integrated. Central Asia is not developed and needs investment, industry, ports and technology. Economic corridors would not only lead to the exchange of goods and trade, but CARs, Tajiks, Uzbeks and others would be arriving in massive numbers via Afghanistan (once peace prevailed) into Iran and Pakistan (Shanghai Daily, 2006). Pakistani services could reach sources rich in but services deficient in CARs.

"The concept had suggested a transit highway from Gwadar to Dalbandin, onto the west of Kandar, Grazing Heart, and onto Mari in Turkmenistan. From Mati it would link west to Ashgabad and north to Tashkent and the main branch to Almaty in Kazakhstan. A parallel one would go through the Karakoram Highway, through the Xinjiang border, Tajikistan, onto Bishkek and then Almaty in Kazakhstan, in the land of the Kyrgyz Steppe, south of Siberia" (Mir, 2013).

CARs occupies a 'Central Strategic Position' between Russia, Europe, Iran and China, and Pakistan and Afghanistan in the south. The Central Asian States never developed as well as the west of Russia during the time of the USSR. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan hold huge energy assets. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have small energy assets, while Uzbekistan is self-contained. Investment from abroad is coming. Pakistan and Central Asia need improvement in their development. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan had agreed on a north-south corridor. It was also acceptable that the East and West corridors would also be needed between Pakistan and Iran and Turkey. The Asian Development Bank agreed to provide funds for these projects, and feasibility reports were undertaken (UNCTAD, 2006).

It is important to estimate the growing need for energy worldwide. It is estimated that gas demand will continue to increase by 2.75% a year for the next twenty years. Improved from 3.5%, the maritime shipping of crude oil and oil requirements has remained constant for many years (Anwar, 2006). Increasing needs of global energy markets will need more resources and more alternative routes for their business activities. The natural resources of Central Asia are becoming increasingly important in this scenario, and the port of Gwadar is one of the future paths for their access to world energy markets.

iv. Turkmenistan-Afghan-Pakistan and India (TAPI): Balochistan is a great gateway of energy; it is an open fact. TAPI is considered the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India proposed energy pipeline. The TAPI project was examined by former Soviet Russians and the liberation of Central Asian states. Afghanistan was facing insurgency in the Taliban era, so she postponed the project. These energy connections further delayed the project because of the American invasion of Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States of America supports this route because of US sanctions on Iran, Pakistan and India's proposed gas pipeline. Now the TAPI project is stating again that an international oil company from the US had been given the contract for TAPI. Four thermal powerhouses and two oil refineries were also part of the project (Khan, 2010).

Other ongoing projects, like the TAPI pipeline, were a bright hope to help revive Afghanistan's economy. This pipeline could bring in \$300 million as royalty to Afghanistan (Abbas, 2002). The influx of foreign investment and money could help stabilize the country's economy and the development of its structure. It can be identified; a government pro-United States in Afghanistan will facilitate the involvement of US companies in the pipeline project. Already Afghanistan trade was handled through Karachi port, and after the completion of the Gwadar port, it will handle the Afghanistan trading activities. The Afghan finance minister (now president) offered Afghanistan support for the development of the port of Gwadar (Dawn, 2003). Pakistan needs to keep Afghanistan peaceful for better economic performance of the region.

v. Trade Potential: The Caspian Sea has huge reserves of natural resources estimated at US \$4 trillion. CARs will have more than 80% of the United States' oil. One of the shortest routes available for Central Asia is the port of Gwadar. The Turkmenistan to Gwadar gas

pipeline of TAPI, 1,400 km in length, can pump the Turkmen gas to the global market. This idea is, however, directly linked with peace in Afghanistan (Jehanzeb, 2006). The possible assets and proven energy reserves of the Caspian Sea region, between 17 and 49 billion barrels, are comparable to the proven oil reserves of Qatar on the low end and to the U.S. on the high end. Similarly, the natural gas assets are evaluated at 232 trillion cubic feet, which is approximately the same as the gas assets of Saudi Arabia (Jehanzeb, 2006). The volumes of these reserves present a gainful source to be tapped by the world's energy markets.

vi. Tajikistan Transit Trade Distances: The geostrategic position of Gwadar Port has the potential to develop a transit economy after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is at the new phase of rebuilding. Economic growth in China is now rated at 9 percent and the Chinese are developing their western areas, but their own coast is 4500 km away from the western areas. Gwadar has the shortest route of 2600 km from Central Asian States as compared to Turkey's 5000 km and Iran's 4500 km distances. The deep-sea port of Gwadar deals with the trade ships of China, Southeast Asian states and CARs (Jabeen, 2008).

Due to the geographical proximity and location, Gwadar has three main players as competitors for transit trade with Central Asia: Chahbahar, Bandar Abbas and Karachi. The distance and proximity of the advantageous/disadvantageous Gwadar port to each of these neighboring ports with respect to the Central Asian republics are as follows (Ahmad, 2013).

Turkmenistan, joining the shortest road links from Gwadar to Ashgabat, the port of Gwadar faces a distance disadvantage of about 260 km and 165 km from the ports of Iran, Chahbahar and Bandar Abbas, respectively. "Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, using the shortest road link from Gwadar to Tashkent, Gwadar faces a distance advantage of 265 km and 195 km with Bandar Abbas and Chahbahar, respectively." Dushanbe of Tajikistan has a distance advantage of 280 km and 210 km with Bandar Abbas and Chahbahar, respectively (Jehanzeb, 2006). As pointed out, Gwadar has a distance advantage over Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over its regional competitors, the ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar in the region. Despite the port of Karachi having a remote advantage, it would not concern it if it worked at its full volume. Thus, the Gwadar port is the most important and viable option available with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan regarding road links.

vii. The Expected Trade Potential of Cars via Gwadar is as Follows: Uzbekistan Transit trade may import and export, mainly from/to East Asia. Imports of future transit via Uzbekistan and Pakistan are US \$160 million, while exports of cotton, containing the enormous share of exports, would compete with Pakistan. Turkmenistan transit trade should be limited because of its established trade routes via the Caspian Sea (Niazi, 2006). Tajikistan transit trade will be important if Tajikistan is diversifying its trade partners. Such an arrangement would increase the commercial potential of Central Asia via Gwadar. Moreover, in the long term, the port of Gwadar could be another route for the demand and supply of abundant oil and gas resources of Central Asia to markets worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The geostrategic environment is considered one of the important elements that are effective towards prosperity and the location of Pakistan in a region which has economic, political and strategic significance. The sea is the most critical element of the environment of the world, occupying almost three-quarters of the surface of the world. It was instrumental to

the political changes as a result of the approach of powerful nations to occupy the underdeveloped and comparatively poor countries, that is, the occupation of India by the British Government through the East India Company. Even the discovery of the United States by Columbus also became possible through navigation over the sea. The geostrategic position of Pakistan is unique. It is the confluence state of South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, China and the Indian Ocean.

The prospects of revival of the old Silk Route to improve trade relations between Pakistan and China have become very prominent in this context. Gwadar was a very small port in Pakistan, and Kashgar is situated in a hilly area almost neglected for a long period. Since the industrial development in Kashgar, the Chinese government realized the dire need to have the shortest route for imports and exports for the economic zone of Kashgar. Pakistan, being a friendly neighbor, offered the route of Gwadar port for easy access of imports and exports to western parts of China as well as the Middle East and Central Asia. This new scheme would contribute to the economy and prosperity for both the countries. Thus, Gwadar port is vital in terms of importance for the region and South Asia.

Currently, trading activities of transit from Afghanistan and CAR countries will not be a vital trade facilitator. In the light of such developments, the economic corridor will potentially show up progressing movements of import and export activities. Furthermore, the development of industries is a jackpot to sustain and promote effective development at Gwadar's port. The perspective of Gwadar's port shows it, in the longer run, to become a powerhouse and strength of industries contributing to our economy and extending benefits over its competitors at the regional level. Development of industry will accelerate trading activities of the country via Gwadar port and strengthen the economy of Pakistan.

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