

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Architect of Pakistan-China relations

April 29, 2017

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Pakistan and China are the closest of friends. They are strategic partners, in war and peace alike. Sino-Pakistan friendship is globally seen as a role model for nations to learn from. China and Pakistan are now involved in the construction of a multi-billion dollar project known as the “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” (CPEC). The aim is to harmonise the development and further strengthen the existing ties. This story of robust cooperation and trust however goes back to the 1950s. It is widely observed Sino-Pakistan relationships owes to men and women in both countries, who worked selflessly to nurture this relationship. Some of them will always remain unknown while a few can be identified easily. Among these great personalities, Geng Biao is a record of history.

Geng Biao the fiery general from the army was summoned by Chairman Mao. He was asked to relinquish his diplomatic assignment at Sweden and reach Pakistan as new Chinese ambassador to Pakistan. He although very unfamiliar with his new appointment readily accepted and promised to fulfill his new tasks in his new capacity as a challenge.

Geng Biao is the chief architect of Pakistan-China relations. He was born on August 26, 1909 in Liling a small county in Hunan Province. He started from very humble beginnings, he used to work in a lead-zinc mine in Shuishikou, and later on he joined the Communist Party of China (CPC). Before being posted to Pakistan in 1956, he served as the Chinese ambassador to Sweden. But the visionary decision of Chairman Mao to assign him to Pakistan proved right and just in-time when General Ayub Khan was ruling Pakistan. Geng Biao was indeed the right choice to be posted to Pakistan. He had a long military career, a trait very well respected among Pakistan's military leaders and due to this and his new found diplomatic skills, and he got a very close working relation with President Ayub Khan and the Pakistan Army. This served well as the basis of relationship between the two countries and continues till date. Both armies developed soon a strategic understanding and frequent exchanges at various levels further cemented the two nations closer.

CPEC is not a newly conceived idea, but it is the cultivation of a thought process which Chairman Mao and General Geng Biao had. After only 6 months of holding office in Pakistan, Geng Biao returned to China to attend a high-level meeting. After the meeting Chairman Mao asked Ambassador Geng to stay and discussed about a possibility of opening a new route to China from its western borders into Pakistan. He told Geng “This is your new task”. The Idea was very well perceived in Pakistan and eventually led to the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). We can say that CPEC is a modern day re-incarnation of the decades old idea. Chinese President Xi Jinping was the staff-officer of Geng Biao. While on his first trip to Pakistan, President Xi said “Although this is my first trip to Pakistan but I already know a lot about Pakistan from my former boss Geng Biao.” So it is very likely that Geng Biao’s work regarding opening up road linkages between the two countries had also influenced President Xi’s One Belt, One Road policy. While President Xi was staff officer to General Geng, he learned a lot about Pakistan and developed his vision about the strategic importance of Pakistan China friendship. He was very good office and excellent student too. He was also looked after the Mrs Geng Biao and enjoyed a family like working environment. He was emotionally attached to General Geng. At the death time of General Geng, President Xi was serving in Fujian province as governor. He was shocked with this news and travelled to Beijing to complete all rituals of his funeral.

Ambassador Geng Biao after returning from his diplomatic duties abroad, was made in charge of the CPC's Central Foreign Communication Department. Geng Biao with his exceptional talents and vast experience in military and diplomatic affairs proved to be a man of great promise in Beijing. In 1978, he was appointed as vice-premier of the State Council, in charge of foreign relations, military industry, civil airlines and tourism. In January 1979, he became the Secretary-general and member of Standing Committee of CPC's Central Military Commission. In 1981, he became the Minister of National Defence, and became State Councilor the following year. In 1983, he became Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and Chairman of Foreign Relation Committee in PNC.

Geng Biao was a military genius, a great diplomat, a strategist and above all a kind father too. He left two sons and two daughters. Unfortunately one of his son died and the other one is doing business now a days. His eldest daughter Geng Ying is heading an NGO and actively working in Pak-China Friendship Association, while the younger one Geng Yan (Er Jie) is a prominent researcher and head of "The Silk Route Fund". She has keen interest in the well-being of Pakistan and pro-actively supports CPEC.

While the general served as the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan in 1950s, he noticed that the local bamboo was strong and muscular all around the country. Being so fond of this plant, he transplanted some pieces of the local bamboo in the Chinese Embassy in Karachi (as at that time Karachi was the capital of Pakistan). Over the years, the bamboo has been growing very lush and become a beautiful spot in the Embassy. Known as the 'Sino-Pakistani Friendship Bamboo', it witnessed the development of profound friendship between China and Pakistan in decades.

In the year 2016, Madam Geng Yan, younger daughter of General Geng Biao, visited Pakistan and took the "Friendship Bamboo" back to China. After careful cultivation, the Sino-Pakistani friendship bamboos are now settled down in the home village of General Geng Biao, carrying with them the warm brotherly friendship of the Pakistani people. 'Pak-Cheen Dosty Zinada Bad'.