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## An Analytical Study of Tourism Development in Northern Areas of Pakistan and AJK: A Study from the CPEC Perspective

**Abstract:** *The CPEC is a mega project with international significance between Pakistan and China. This mega construction project has 54 billion US dollars' worth ranging from roads, railways and ports. Both countries claim that this will bring economic and political stability to the south Asian region that links Gwadar port of Pakistan with Kashgar in western China. Besides this, the link will also pass through Muzaffarabad the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Gilgit area. This research investigates factors affecting tourism in the context of CPEC in the northern areas of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. This research used a self-developed research questionnaire to collect primary data from tourism-related officials in Pakistan and Chinese workers working on different projects in Pakistan. SPSS statistical software was used to gain descriptive and inferential statistics for analysis. The key finding of this research is that there is a lack of proper awareness among the public and institutional workers to understand how to gain advantages from this project. It has been noted that CPEC will be helpful to develop the tourism sector if proper exposure and training will be given to the relevant employees.*

**Key Words:** CPEC, Infrastructure Development, OBOR, Tourism Industry, Tourists, Gilgit Baltistan, Murree, Neelam, Muzaffarabad, Banjosa, Tolipeer

### Introduction

This is an era of globalization, and for different economic activities, the whole world is interconnected with each other. Development of different potential markets and these markets are interlinked with one another and any change in the world affects them directly or indirectly. Here comes the concept of economic integration into play, where different economies reduce the trade barriers and work efficiently to survive and achieve their targets (Baldwin, 2004). As a result of this integration, a significant impact on the economies will be observed. It works for the betterment of humans and the countries'

economies around the world (Balassa, 2013). Tourism is an important factor that involves society, culture, and people's movement from one place to another for different purposes outside their homes. Tourism is considered an organized multidimensional business activity that enhances the country's economy (Kumar, 2015; Baloch, 2007). Over the last few decades, tourism has gained significant importance worldwide. It plays a vital role in developing the country's economy by providing a source of income for students, parents, and many others.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is known as a strategic sphere based on creating an

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economic corridor that links Gwadar in Pakistan and Kashgar in China. Moreover, two conditions are required for the development of this corridor; the first one is the Gwadar port, and the second is connecting Gwadar and Kashgar through the surface by creating surface connectivity (Ali et al., [2017](#)). CEPC for China is a megaproject that will boost its trade worldwide and strengthen its economic muscles. Substantially, the cost and travel distance to Gulf countries will reduce because of the shortest path that Pakistan will provide through Gwadar port. Moreover, China will have an independent path free from any other country's interference, especially the USA and India. This path also decreases labour costs, and China will become able to develop new business markets in other countries as well. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is mainly a China project with massive investment. Its main motive was to strengthen its trade and commerce and deliver its products worldwide by using the shortest possible route. China's main focus was reviving ancient routes and connecting them by developing different corridors i.e., northern, central, and southern (Nakhoda [2017](#)). CPEC would entail establishing several economic and industrial zones and physical roads and railways links connecting Pakistan and China (Hali et al. [2015](#)). The Gwadar port has gained immense strategic significance with intense geostrategic competition (Haider, [2015](#)).

China 2001 launched a strategy named the 'Go west' strategy, which turned out to be a strong initiative in the form of CPEC. This strategy aimed to develop the country's poorer western part that remains away from the economic benefit (Hussain, [2017](#)). For this purpose, around \$325 billion were invested in major infrastructure projects in this region. It includes the Qinghai-Tibet railway, almost 2000km, and was completed in 2006; the airport was also extended. Many still assume that the 'Go west' strategy still can be improved. As an extension of China's "Go west " policy and the proximity of Xinjiang province to Pakistan, a transport corridor through Pakistan was a logical course to adopt, being an economical and shortest route to the middle east, Africa and also the rest of the world (Lan, [2015](#)). The CPEC program being mutually beneficial was

envisioned by the leadership of the two brotherly countries for implementation. Gwadar port- the cornerstone of CEPC, Chinese 40-year operation rights to the port. This is significantly important for Beijing because it allows China to ship some of its oil from the Persian Gulf to that port and pump it through Western China pipelines. Moreover, with the transport route some 6,000 miles shorter, China will be able to save billion in transport costs and saved time. Indeed, Pakistan in general and Gwadar, in particular, will be playing a critical role in China's joint plans for a Silk Road economic belt and a Maritime Silk Road linking China, Europe and beyond (Javed & Ahmed, [2016](#)).

The tourism industry has become a significant economic sector as this industry contributes US \$7.6 trillion to the world economy (10.2% of the world GDP) because travelling of 1.2 billion tourists to different destinations and also generated jobs for the people. Moreover, there is a major association between global trading and worldwide travelling (Kulendran & Wilson, [2000](#); Shan & Wilson, [2001](#); Turaco & Turtureanu, [2010](#)). The world Travel & Tourism Council has predicted that the tourism sector has been growing day by day, and it reached a rate of 4% per year which is faster than any other sector like transport and manufacturing (World Economic Forum, [2015](#)). Global tourism's main function is to promote peace and build a bridge between different cultures; it also helps in improving the living standard of the people through economic development (Zortuk, [2009](#)). Tourism has diversity in its influences as it affects multiple sectors including hotels, restaurants, air transport, road transport, communication and labour such as tourist guides, porters, cooks etc. (Kumar, [2015](#)). It is an important means of infrastructure development and peace. Travelling has been the speciality of every human being since the early era, but from the middle of this century, mass tourism has been observed as the primary world industry (Ayres, [2000](#)).

Pakistan has excellent prospects for tourism with various options and has many attraction sites that satisfy the tourist's needs, both national and international. The four main categories of tourism in Pakistan have planned are religious,

archaeological and Historical, Ecotourism and Adventure tourism. The current study investigates the China-Pakistan economic corridor's role to support Pakistan's tourism industry, particularly in northern areas of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. There is high business potential for tourism in the context of CPEC.

### **Problem Statement**

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It is hard to access the literature gap related to my topic because of insufficient literature availability. As it is an admitted fact of the contemporary era, the CPEC has become one of the most important projects based on regional development and international concerns and views. There is a huge imbalance in the tourism industry between the two countries based on infrastructure, size of the investment, and public attitude toward tourism. Therefore this study will bridge the gap in literature availability to some extent and understand various dimensions of this project. Currently, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the hottest running project around the globe.

CEPC is intended to improve the Pakistani economy through the rapid construction of modern transportation infrastructure and the establishment of economic zones. CEPC will directly impact global economics by boosting trade. No doubt CEPC brings with it numerous benefits which will improve Pakistan's economy. With Chinese investment of \$46 billion injected into the development of industrial zones, and infrastructure and overcoming power crises, Pakistan will experience a positive change in the economy. This investment will help eliminate the gap in cities and villages, and it will boost business activity. With the increased investment by foreign companies, we can easily see a growing job market, higher tax returns for the government, development of cities, improved security, better health facilities, flow of foreigners in the country, elimination of negative image around the globe. This is the point where Pakistan will prove to the world how safe and beautiful it is. CEPC is not just limited to the economic boost, but it will impact our country both socially and culturally. Travel and tourism

have a great association with other industries in the national economy. Pakistan has great potential and offers diverse opportunities for tourists. CEPC will result in an increased demand for travelling which means a growing demand for the hospitality sector. The development of CPEC will lead to the development of infrastructure, which positively impacts Pakistan's tourism. Northern areas and Azad Kashmir are considered paradises on earth and seem to be the best places for tourists. But still, the tourists and tourism industry is not as flourished as it should be. Northern areas and Azad Kashmir are part of CPEC. How to manage and market them properly to attract tourists.

This project is about investigating the factors affecting tourism in the context of CPEC. Discover and find out the steps and potential of the tourism industry. Analysis of the problems and issues faced by the people of northern areas and Azad Kashmir. This project aims to check the viability of the new tourism management and marketing strategies to enhance tourism in northern areas and Azad Kashmir in the context of CPEC. The development of CPEC will lead to infrastructure development, which will also positively impact tourism in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. As Pakistan and Azad Kashmir are full of the natural beauty of swat, Narran, Kaghan, Murree, Banjosa, Tolipeer, Neelam etc. Also, to what extent people of China and Pakistan are aware of CPEC's impact and tourism development in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir? Comprehensive development of railways and roads' infrastructure will enhance trade and boost other things such as employment, tourism development of natural areas, and rural areas' connection to urban parts. Pakistan is the home of stunning Himalayan peaks, including K2. It has the beautiful Arabian Sea, deserts, and historic forts. With all this, it is supposed to be one of the world's most incredible tourist destinations.

### **Literature Review**

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As the new century begins, the world is rapidly moving towards globalization. Moreover, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have seen a huge establishment of regional connectivity and a globally strategic

environment worldwide because it is impossible for any country to survive alone. The strategic environment encourages the countries to build a relationship that benefits them in all aspects such as industrial ventures, infrastructure, commerce, and other development programs (Alam et al., 2009). Economic corridors and transport infrastructure play an important role in establishing any country and are considered a technique for developing rural regions focusing on the investment in vital areas like roads, trade, energy, and communication (Ramachandran and Linde, 2011). After the formation of Pakistan, many ups and downs came on their way, and many countries celebrated and grieved these ups and downs with Pakistan. Its top friend in Pakistan includes Saudi Arabia, the USA, the United Kingdom, China and many others. But China is a friend who has always supported Pakistan in all matters, and no one is like China. China never left Pakistan in its bad times and supported Pakistan in all aspects, whether technology, skill, finance, etc. Here this quote, a friend in need is a friend indeed fully describes the Pakistan-China relationship. Both countries are providing equal benefits to each other (Vandewalle, 2015).

As a good friend of Pakistan, China has launched one of the most extensive investment programs for Pakistan. Under the umbrella of this investment, many infrastructure and power projects will be funded, which will help the country get rid of energy crises and fulfil the infrastructure needs. As China is not just a friend of Pakistan, it is also a trading partner of Pakistan, and it is also assumed that this trade has a significant impact on Pakistan's GDP. Due to this friendly relationship, the project is named CPEC (the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). It is also expected that CPEC will bring stability to Pakistan. The CPEC will also help Pakistan achieve economic stability globally, waiting for a long (Shah, 2015). It is expected that CPEC will improve and strengthen the trade and commerce connectivity between the two countries. Chinese premier Li Keqiang emphasized the construction of CPEC during his visit to Pakistan in May 2013 (Tiezzi, 2014). The corridor will connect Gwadar port in Baluchistan (Pakistan) to Kashgar in North-West China,

making the Gwadar, a central hub in the region, fully operational. When the corridor is completed, it is expected to cut the 12,000-kilometer route that the Middle East take to reach the Chinese port. Before the formation of Pakistan, China and Pakistan were in trade relations. This project connects almost all the Middle East areas, Central Asia and Europe and Africa (Abid and Ashfaq, 2015).

The CPEC is a profitable project for both China and Pakistan, and we can see its direct and immediate impact on the rest of the world and equally on the mainland. For China, the shipping cost of goods to the Middle East, and Europe will be much reduced than they were paying before (Anwar, 2011; Zafar, 2014). Although Pakistan will also charge a fee for the transportation of goods, that will be much less than the one they were paying before. Moreover, if Pakistan fully understands the magical influence of CPEC and successfully provides a suitable environment to China, it will help the country to gain more profit in all aspects of life, whether it's education, health, and skill development (Shaikh et al. 2016). With the development of CPEC, the distance and transportation cost of goods will also reduce. As the freight charges from Abu Dhabi to Shanghai are \$2000 for 40 feet container, it will take 16 days to reach the destination. When the CPEC become operative, these charges will reduce to almost \$200-\$250 per 40 feet container, and they will reach the destination in just 2-3 days (Lin et al., 2015). Hence CPEC is extraordinarily beneficial as it gives the shortest and most effective way for its massive trade. Moreover, the time required to reach the destination also reduces to almost half, i.e. 50% to 25%. The year 2015 is marked as the CPEC implementation year, and under the umbrella of this CPEC variety of projects will be taken into consideration that calls for completion by 2030 (Herald, 2016).

Touching new heights of friendship and under the umbrella of CPEC, China and Pakistan have agreed upon 51 Memos to enhance cooperation in different areas. The primary objective of this project is to connect China's western region of Xinjiang to Gwadar port of Baluchistan. When this project turns into reality, Pakistan will be having a network of roads,

railways and pipelines. This road will be having a distance of approximately 2,700 kilometres from Gwadar to Kashgar. The motorway that will also be part of this project is 1,100 kilometres long, and it is spread from Lahore to Karachi, also the Karakoram highway from Kashgar via Khunjab pass to Islamabad. Also, a train track between Peshawar and Karachi will be built. The CPEC is not only about infrastructural connectivity; it also helps in exchanging culture between China and Pakistan. Over the last three decades, China has achieved remarkable economic growth and is considered the fastest-growing economy globally and is also called the sleeping giant.

On the other hand, if we look at Pakistan, it is a country with low economic growth. The CPEC will help Pakistan get a strategically important regional position (Iqbal, 2015). Pakistan is located geographically in a strategically important region and has become a source of attraction for many global powers. Hence, the development of CPEC, especially the Gwadar port, will boost its strategic importance. China started its first venture through the CPEC in October 2016. The major export was the fishery industry. It also provides employment opportunities to the poor people of Baluchistan and helps them improve their standard of living by availing of these opportunities (Khan, 2013).

If we look back to human development history, rural areas have been considered a favourite for tourism activities in both developing and developed countries (Chaung 2011). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2016), tourism has occupied a significant and diverse position in this era of globalization. It has become an important sector for any country's economic development. Tourism has proved to be the most significant and fastest-growing sector around the globe. In many developing countries, tourism is considered a key priority. The state works to strengthen the tourism infrastructure as tourism leads to improved infrastructure and preservation of cultural heritage and the environment (Barlayaev, Akhumeto, & Nasyro, 2009). This has been proved by the success of the tourism industry in rural areas of China. According to the National Tourism Administration 2012, US

\$34.9 billion in revenues was generated, 720 million tourists' arrival recorded, and 85000 villages engaged throughout 31 provinces (Zhang et. al, 2015). Pakistani Northern areas are full of beautiful locations that may have a large attraction for tourism. However, due to the government institutions' lack of attention, this has still not been done (Kumar, 2015).

The establishment of any country's tourism industry mainly depends on the policies that provide safety to the people, both national and international, visiting the places. The second thing is the country's positive image through positive publicity and detailed information about the areas that attract tourists. CPEC will provide new ventures of development, trade, and tourism (Ali et. al, 2017). In 2016 almost 965,498 tourists travelled to Pakistan, and around 50 million make short trips to different Pakistan locations. Besides the national tourists' people from the UK, USA, India, and China also travelled to Pakistan and add their contribution to the tourism inflow (De & Bush, 2010). Northern Areas of Pakistan are the homes of several mountain peaks over 7000m which attract mountaineers, especially K2.

Moreover, they have old forests, ancient architecture, Hunza and Chitral valleys etc. As a part of the beauty, Gilgit Baltistan holds an immense strategic position. Its border is connected with China, and when the CPEC is complete, it also acts as a gateway. With improved security and infrastructure facilities, tourism will flourish in Pakistan (Ali et. al, 2017). It is also assumed that besides the other advantages of CPEC, it will also increase Chinese investment in the tourism sector of Pakistan through the development of roads and railways to connect both countries. This project is significant in generating new investment opportunities for Pakistan and China, and the rest of the world.

As a good friend of Pakistan, China has launched one of the most influential investment programs for Pakistan. Under the umbrella of this investment, many infrastructure and power projects have been funded, which will help the country get rid of energy crises. As China is not just a good friend of Pakistan, it is also a trading

partner of Pakistan, and it has been assumed that this trade has a significant impact on Pakistan's GDP. CPEC is expected to bring stability to Pakistan and help achieve the world's economic stability that it has waited for a long (shah, 2016). The Chinese tour agencies in China conducted a survey. According to that survey, outdoor tourism has increased because of relaxation in their visa policies and other tourism facilities.

The development of One Belt One Road (OBOR) will bring more opportunities for both countries, and tourism is also a significant opportunity that increases development. It has been observed that the Chinese visa application increased in the year 2016. Also, Chinese companies are interested in tourism development and have some joint ventures.

The development of CPEC has made Pakistan one of the favourite destinations for all investors worldwide. This project holds enough importance for both countries. But when we compare the current scenario, China has become one of the world's largest economies. However, Pakistan is still struggling to get rid of many external and internal problems. With the help of CPEC, it has been assumed that FDI in Pakistan

will increase and technological advancement will flourish. It is believed that people's living the standard will also improve.

Pakistan has also supported China in getting SAARC membership, while China supported Pakistan in acquiring the membership of Shanghai cooperation (Vandewalle, 2015). The CPEC will also conduct a research and development program in Pakistan. The CPEC will also improve Pakistan's international reputation. Tourism which makes up a small part of Pakistan's earnings can benefit. The road from where Kashgar starts in the cross-border region is considered to be a mountaineer's paradise. It is the home of five mountain which is 8,000 meters and more than 50 mountains which are 7,000 meters. It is home to the world's second-highest peak, K2 and Nanga Parbat, the world's 9th highest peak in Gilgit-Baltistan. Previously, foreign tourists have been hesitant to climb these wondrous mountains, but now, these are considered safe because of the government's security measures. Local tourist travelling in Pakistan is increasing, and it is believed that an expected number of 50 million tourists will come (Pakistan tourism development cooperation, 2016).

### Relationship Model

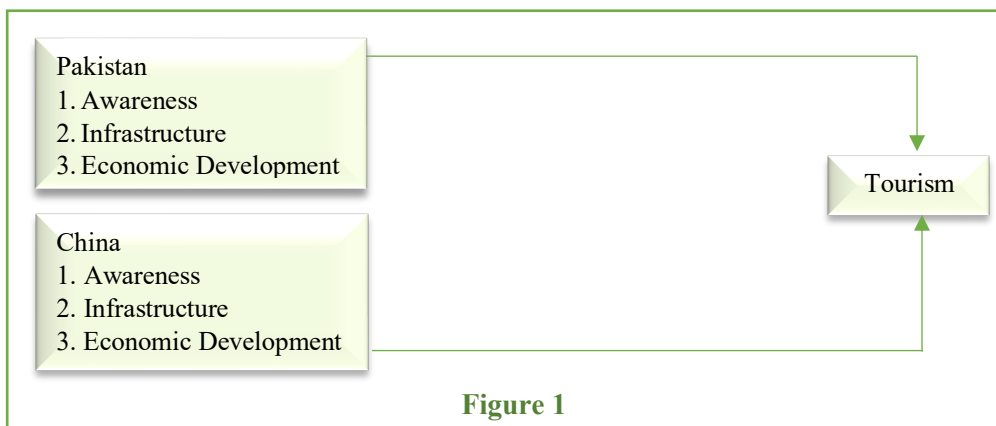


Figure 1

### Methodology

The present study was conducted to understand the potential benefits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor for the tourism industry of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, particularly in the

northern areas of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir and how CPEC infrastructural development will facilitate to achieve the desired outcomes related to the tourism industry. The people of Pakistan and China have an awareness of the CPEC and

how they perceive tourism in the context of CPEC and economic development. Primary data was collected by using the 5 Points Likert Scale to gain feedback from a given population. Preliminary data includes the result of the survey conducted at different places to know people's views, including locals, tour operators, and people of china working here on other projects in

Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The non-probability sampling technique was used to collect data from Pakistan, AJK and Chinese professionals working on different Pakistan projects. The collected data is analyzed through SPSS to derive descriptive and correlation statistics.

## Results and Data Analysis

**Table 1.** China

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations						
Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1. Awareness		3.74	.9874	1		
2. Infrastructure	3.69	.8764	.568*	1		
3. Economic Development	3.88	.7796	.609**	.528**	1	
4. Tourism	3.90	.8457	.549*	.610*	.597*	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviation and correlation among variables. The mean and standard deviation for the variable awareness=3.74 (S.D=0.9874). The mean and standard deviation for the variable infrastructure=3.69 (S.D=.8764). The mean and standard deviation for the variable economic development = 3.88 (S.D=.7796), while the

mean and standard deviation for the variable tourism = 3.90 (S.D= .8457). The correlation shows that the variable awareness and infrastructure and tourism are positively and significantly related to each other, i.e. statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ), and the significant level at Economic development is ( $p<0.01$ ).

**Table 2.** Pakistan

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations						
Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1.Awareness		3.56	.8745	1		
2. Infrastructure	3.67	.9014	.547*	1		
3.Economic Development	3.64	.9764	.591**	.618**	1	
4. Tourism	3.81	.9214	.608*	.641*	.657*	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviation and correlation among variables. The mean and standard deviation for the variable awareness=3.56 (S.D=0.8745). The mean and standard deviation for the variable infrastructure=3.67 (S.D=.9041). The mean and standard deviation for the variable economic development = 3.64 (S.D=.9764), while the

mean and standard deviation for the variable tourism = 3.81 (S.D= .9214). The correlation shows that the variable awareness and infrastructure and tourism are positively and significantly related to each other, i.e. statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ), and the significant level at Economic development is ( $p<0.01$ ).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

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This study was conducted to understand the potential benefits of tourism in the context of CPEC. The statistics mentioned above show a comparison between Pakistanis and Chinese people regarding the awareness of CPEC. The most important finding of this study is that people are uncertain about CPEC projects' outcomes due to a lack of awareness of this strategic project. However, this study clearly indicates that CPEC will help develop Pakistan's tourism industry and play a significant role in the country's economic development. China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a star project and will provide new ventures for development, trade and connectivity for both China and Pakistan. The tourism industry is considered the backbone of a country's economy; it becomes a tremendous revenue-generating sector globally. Pakistan is blessed with natural beauty, and this CPEC will boost the tourism industry of Pakistan via this One Belt One Road initiative. Pakistan and Azad Kashmir are recognized for green natural beauty, particularly Azad Kashmir is known as paradise on earth due to its lush green valleys and mountains. It is believed that economic growth has a direct influence on tourism growth which can be observed in the development of infrastructures such as airports, roads, railways and highways. As the CPEC's main focus is the establishment of links between China and Pakistan. This infrastructure provides the essential requirement for the tourism industry to get established. CPEC is a mega project and would impact the development of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir's tourism industry. There are different categories of tourism worldwide, and they are famous for those particular categories.

Pakistan also offers different tourism varieties: adventure tourism (mainly in northern areas of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir), archaeological tourism (ancient civilization), religious tourism, and ecotourism.

However, Pakistan is still unable to achieve this potential of tourism due to the lack of facilities and infrastructure. But with the help of CPEC, it is believed that we will be able to accomplish those tourism potentials where we are lacking. The hard infrastructure in tourism relates to the roads, railways, buildings etc., while the soft infrastructure guides people and provides information on different cultures, heritage, maps etc. The successful completion of CPEC will enhance hard infrastructure, while for the soft infrastructure, social media have to play their role in promoting tourism (ATDI, [2010](#)). Nowadays, Google plays a significant role in this regard, and it only needs little capital. CPEC is a star project, and awareness regarding CPEC is created among people using different sources, especially social media. It can play a significant role in creating awareness regarding different projects taken under the umbrella of CPEC. From this information, people can avail the opportunities related to them. The tourism industry requires proper management to survive and play an essential role in developing a country's economy. Awareness campaigns regarding CPEC must be arranged, keeping in mind the different prospects of the economy as my focus is on tourism. Precisely this study suggests that to attain the desired objective collaboration, it is necessary to have comprehensive coordination and understanding between public and private sector institutions and sectors.

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