



Karakoram Highway is the Vital Link for China's OBOR

People in South-East Asia region don't know as much about *Silk Road* than they know about *Silk Route*, understandably so because of the famous Karakoram Highway. Karakoram Highway commonly known as KKH is the highest international road in the world crossing Himalayas – traverses southern route of the many routes identified by ancient Silk Road travelers. KKH was built during the period 1959 – 1979 by China and Pakistan. It is the National Highway – 35 (N-35) in Pakistan and National Highway 314 in China, connecting Pakistani provinces of Punjab, KPK and Gilgit-Baltistan with Chinese province of Xinjiang. Starting from Hasan Abdal in Pakistan and ending at Kashgar with a length of approx. 1300 km, KKH is often referred as Eighth Wonder of the World.

In the perspective of OBOR (One Belt – One Road) and CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) the importance of KKH has increased many fold. Road distance of Kashgar from Urumqi is 1470 km. Urumqi has a population close to four million and is the largest city of north-western China region. Historically, Urumqi's southern suburb, Luntai dating back to 648 AD, has been a part of ancient Northern route of Silk Road. . Since 1990, Urumqi has seen speedy economic development and today Urumqi is an important transport and commercial hub for OBOR and CPEC.

The **Silk Road** or **Silk Route** was an ancient network of trade routes connecting the East (*China, Korea, Japan, Sub-continent, Persia, Arabia*) with the West (*Europe and the nations along Mediterranean sea and Horn of Africa*). The trade on Silk Route dates back to 200 BCE (*Before Common Era (BCE) is same as Before Christ (BC)*) and China has always been a route for this trade. China, even in those old days, was very keen to safeguard their trade products and extended the Great Wall of China to ensure the protection of trade route.

Today's OBOR or CPEC is basically a manifestation of China's development strategy and framework of Silk Road Economic Belt (*SREB*) and Maritime Silk Road (*MSR*) which is built on the traditional and historic fundamentals of Silk Road. The SREB and MSR initiatives were announced by China in 2013 and its coverage is primarily focused on Asia and Europe, while the 60 countries that will be encompassed in these initiatives include Oceanic and East African countries. It is well-known that overland economic belt and maritime Silk Road will get connected to each other through CPEC. Karakoram Highway as part of CPEC is a vital link connecting the SREB and MSR.