

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

Daily
Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

August 05, 2019

Why Afghanistan Matters for the US

The eighth round of peace talks between the Taliban and the United States started in Doha, Qatar on Saturday.

It is expected that this session of negotiations to be the most crucial phase of talks to end the 18-year war in Afghanistan as a peace agreement is expected at the end of this round of talks. Once a peace agreement is signed between the two countries, they may mainly focus on sustainable economic partnership to ensure mutual economic interests of the US and Afghanistan.

When peace is restored in the war torn Afghanistan, the country will be able to play a strategic role in the regional economic development and regional connectivity. Afghanistan as a fast growing emerging market will gain a vital significance in the region due to its strategic importance close to some of the largest and fastest-growing markets in the world. Afghanistan is strategically located between the energy-rich republics of Central Asia and the major seaports in South Asia, providing a key transit route for central Asian oil and gas to markets in South Asia as well as overseas.

Further, it has been stated that Afghanistan holds greater than one trillion dollars' worth of mineral resources, including gold, iron, copper, aluminum, gemstones, chromite, Sulphur, and talc. Based on the above mentioned factors Afghanistan can change to an important political and economic partner for the United States. However, the vital role that Afghanistan can play in improving the regional security must not be overseen. Due to its geopolitical location, it can contribute either to strengthening security or worsening it in the region. Therefore, to forge a strong, new partnership, leaders from both countries should look holistically at how to improve Afghanistan's economic and security resiliency as well as maximize its enormous potential as a regional leader and long-term partner for the U.S.

The US shall emphasize on the importance of collaboration and partnership on security, governance and regional leadership of Afghanistan. These three priorities are interrelated and are of critical importance to increased partnership between the Afghanistan and the US. IS Khorasan, Al-Qaeda and more conservative parts of Taliban will remain as terrorist groups that threaten the peace and security of the regional and the world fighting forces; Thus, violent extremism remains a major challenge in addition to other growing tensions between and among communities along social, ethnic, religious and economic lines in the country.

So far the core Afghan government policies and practices have been reactive rather than proactive in addressing vulnerability and violence. Weakness in the criminal justice system poorly funded local government structures, corruption, and detached national policies have eroded trust between communities and government, further diminishing the ability of government to mitigate tensions within and between communities. Dropping commodity prices and unprecedented and unpredictable have underscored the shortcoming of social and economic policies, resulting in reactive responses to crises only as they explode or long after they have exploded. As a result, Afghan government needs structural reforms in these areas. The US and international community shall help Afghan government to bring such fundamental reforms if they want the country not to change to the save heaven of the terrorist groups.

The current failure by Afghanistan to prioritize the causes rather than the consequences of crises has been bad for Afghan and U.S. interests. Due to the urgent needs once crises have exploded, we have seen over reliance on the deployment of security forces, leading to tensions and potential flashpoints that undermine security. A stabilized and peaceful Afghanistan has positive impacts for American businesses, international security, and the stability of the entire region. A secure Afghanistan means Afghanistan cannot export criminality and violence, as well as import it from its neighbors in crisis. As the U.S. pushes to eradicate, Al-Qaeda and ISIS and their affiliates, preventing violence from Conservative Taliban members and other terrorist groups are critical to this effort.

Yet the United States should not view Afghanistan as a set of problems to be eradicated, but as an opportunity to invest and strengthen the ability of Afghanistan to handle national and regional crises on its own. The U.S. must engage Afghanistan as a partner and resource in the region through political, economic, development, and security cooperation. It should support Afghanistan in strengthening detection and response to early warning signs, practical security reforms to improve response and community-trust, and respect and tolerance to religious freedom and ethnic diversity.

Afghanistan is the trendsetter in Central and South Asia and an important partner for the U.S. government and American businesses. Security, governance, and regional leadership are three areas where the U.S. and Afghanistan must work together to address Afghanistan as more than the sum of its parts. Overall, our two countries need to progress their partnership beyond the reactive response to segmented crises to forge a holistic partnership that promotes the long-term growth and stability that is in our mutual interests. A peace deal with the Taliban is the golden opportunity for Afghanistan to lay a foundation for long term economic and security partnership with the US to ensure sustainable security and economic development in the region and beyond.

Has a Surge in Export Made Changes in Local Economy?

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghanistan's central location in Eurasia makes it a hub for goods and services. Benefiting from its bilateral Trade Agreements and membership in the World Trade Organization, Afghanistan has stepped up its exportation in recent years, especially through establishing air corridors.

Afghanistan has fertile soil and its fruit is highly popular in the region. The country has exported 255 tons of fresh fruit so far this year to India, Europe and some Arab nations, making 30 percent increase compared to the same period in 2018.

Afghanistan's economy is highly dependent on agriculture as 85-90 percent population in rural areas is engaged in it, which is essential for the livelihood of 76 percent of the total population and accounts for about a quarter of the country's Gross Domestic Product in recent years. Fresh fruit, vegetable, nuts, olive, wheat, maize, sugar can, saffron, to name but a few, are the agricultural products of Afghanistan.

A surge in the exportation of the country's domestic products is a very happy news for Afghan citizens in general and for Afghan farmers in particular. Supporting domestic products will be essential for contributing to local economy and generating incentive for farmers to work harder. If the country's agricultural products are not supported, farmers are most likely to resume cultivating narcotic drug.

Despite the surge in exportation, challenges till remain formidable. Lack of modern facilities at the country's airports and ports, including cold storage facilities and required scanners, are cited a major challenge for Afghan investors. In addition to air corridors, the country has to establish ground routes and railroads for exportation so that it could make exportation affordable for ordinary individuals.

Moreover, lack of cold storage causes serious harm to Afghanistan's agricultural products, including fresh fruit. Take Bamyan province for example, farmers are unable to preserve potatoes and have to transport them to provinces and capital cities and sell them in low price so that their products are not spoiled. Has the government paid attention to public concern in this regard?

To keep the increase in exportation sustainable, fundamental problems should be addressed. For instance, the government, in addition to establishing ground routes and cold storages, should industrialize the products. Af-

ghan universities have to build Research and Development Centers to use agricultural products for other purposes such as medicine, etc. Afghan lecturers in agricultural fields have to do researches and foreign experts have to be invited to support them for the better use of the agricultural products. Afghanistan still has problem with a very basic issue which is packaging. In terms of business, packaging also plays a key role in the sale of products. Khanjan Alokzay, acting chief of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry is cited as saying, "India is checking all our goods in all their ports and they unload all the goods and tear the packages. This damages our goods". His concern is justifiable and this issue should be resolved.

This year, local farmers also complained about the low price of fruit and lack of proper road for transportation, which increases the transportation cost. In many countries, including China, provinces are linked through proper roads and transportation facilities such as railroads to support domestic import-export. Meanwhile, state-owned companies make contract with local farmers to transport and sell their products to larger cities as well as outside their countries.

Moreover, if there are safe and proper roads, local tourists will tour different provinces and buy local products, which will contribute much to the economy of people.

With this in mind, the government should report how many people have been lifted out of poverty and what is the number of poverty-alleviated areas or provinces in a certain year in the wake of a rise in exportation. The exportation has yet to make tangible changes in local economy. The level of poverty as well as unemployment is still extremely high. Farmers still tend to cultivate narcotic drug to get out of poverty.

The Afghan government has to establish companies for supporting local products in one way or another and create jobs for people so as to lift citizens out of poverty. Indeed, poverty is the main concern for the public and Afghanistan has long way to go so as to promote the country's economy.

The government should pave the ground for foreign investment and offer free lands for years for foreign companies to be established and ensure their safety by guarding them heavily. If the country import each and every thing, the economy will remain fragile. Thus, domestic products should also be supported in the country to decrease the level of import from outside.

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Preventing TB is Rooted in Medical Ethics and Human Rights

By: Bobby Ramakant

With quarter of world's population infected with latent TB (not active TB disease), and in the light of scientific fact that every new case of active TB disease comes from this pool of population infected with latent TB, the writing on the wall is clear: we cannot put TB prevention on the blindspot anymore if we are to eliminate TB globally.

"TB is the biggest infectious disease killer worldwide. With 10 million people with active TB disease every year and 1.6 million deaths (300,000 of these deaths were among people living with HIV), the challenge is enormous. People living with HIV get not just pulmonary TB but also extrapulmonary TB. Drug-resistant TB is a growing threat in Peru and worldwide. It is important to prevent TB as well as to give early diagnosis, proper treatment and care to everyone in need. We need to recognize that in developing countries which are TB high burden nations too, proportion of population infected with latent TB is very high, up to 50%. Latent TB can 'wake up' and cause active TB disease due to range of factors including HIV, or therapies for cancer, immune disorder, organ transplant, etc. We have to prevent TB if we are to end TB" said Dr Eduardo H Gotuzzo, Emeritus Professor, Universidad Peruana, Peru. Dr Eduardo was speaking at the TB HIV Symposium with CNS which was organized around the 10th IAS Conference on HIV Science (IAS 2019) in Mexico.

WE KNEW HOW TO PREVENT TB SINCE 60 YEARS: WHY DELAY?

TB is preventable, treatable and curable: This is scientifically true but not in lives of over 10 million people who got TB disease and over 1.6 million people who died of TB in 2017. We need to walk the talk on the scientific fact that TB can be prevented, and accurate diagnosis, proper treatment and care must become a reality for all those with active TB disease as well as latent TB infection.

Prof Harry Hausler, Chief Executive Officer of TB HIV Care in South Africa, agreed: "TB preventive therapy has been around for a long time but its rollout has been suboptimal. South Africa is a country that has the biggest implementation of TB preventive therapy as well as antiretroviral treatment in the world. More than 400,000 people on TB preventive therapy were initiated last year but that's still 53% of people who are newly enrolled in HIV care. We have another 4.4 million South Africans living with HIV who are already on antiretroviral treatment, but we do not have data to say what proportion of them have access to TB preventive therapy. So, we really do have a long way to go."

Rooting right to TB prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, in core principles of medical ethics, Prof Hausler explained: "There are four main principles of medical ethics: beneficence, which means do what works; non-maleficence, which means do no harm; autonomy, which means allow people to choose; and justice, which is linked to access.

BENEFICENCE: DO WHAT WORKS

Added Prof Hausler: "From the point of view of beneficence we know that TB preventive therapy works very well: we have different TB preventive treatment options, such as, six months of isoniazid (INH) therapy; and new regimens that are in the latest WHO guidelines - 3 months of weekly rifampin INH which works as well as three months of rifampin and INH."

NON-MALEFICENCE: DO NO HARM

"Non-maleficence is do no harm. In fact, the new regimen for TB preventive therapy, 3HP, has less hepatotoxicity as it is less toxic to the liver, making it safer and improving adherence if compared to six months of isoniazid preventive therapy - but both are very safe" said Prof Hausler.

Esnath Manhiri from Zimbabwe national network of people living with HIV, agreed: "People living with HIV are at very high risk of getting infected by TB. My message for people living with HIV is that let's go for TB Preventive Therapy (IPT). This new IPT regimen is very short, has less side effects and treatment completion rate is very high. Let us encourage each

other to go for TPT so that we can prevent ourselves from getting infected by TB."

AUTONOMY AND JUSTICE

"In terms of autonomy, we should be really giving people a choice to access the regimen that they want, so justice comes in - because rifampin currently is just not affordable at its current price. We need to put pressure on the pharmaceutical companies that produce it to bring down the price so that it becomes affordable and can be implemented more widely in high burden countries like South Africa" said Prof Hausler.

People living with HIV should have access to TB preventive therapy and early antiretroviral treatment. "We really need to get price of rifampin down so that it can be one of the regimens that is available to people, as well as we have to update guidelines that should include it as an option. We also need to improve treatment literacy for people living with HIV as well as household contacts who are eligible for TB preventive therapy, because then we can increase demand for TPT. We also need a strong monitoring and evaluation framework because if it is not measured and is not considered important then it is not done. Lastly, we do need a very strong multi-sectoral accountability framework so that we can hold all governments, civil society, private sector and all other stakeholders accountable to reach our ambitious TB preventive therapy targets" emphasized Prof Hausler who leads TB HIV Care. TB HIV Care is an organization that works in South Africa to try and prevent TB, screen for TB and increase access to TB and HIV care, in general population and among key populations.

CHALLENGES IN ROLL-OUT OF TB PREVENTIVE THERAPY

Esnath Manhiri of Zimbabwe national network of people living with HIV, reflected that "People living with HIV in Zimbabwe are receiving TPT but for now we are getting the old regimen, the six months isoniazid preventive therapy (IPT). Most people are not able to get that because of some side effects associated with it, and we are patiently waiting for the new regimen which has less toxicity and is shorter in terms of course duration. Other challenge we are facing in Zimbabwe is that TPT was decentralized, so in some cases you might see some health facilities are reluctant to give the supply, and some health facilities are running out of supplies of TB preventive therapy. My plea to the governments is to have IPT always available for people living with HIV so that we can prevent TB."

GOVERNMENTS COMMITMENT TO ROLL-OUT TPT

In September 2018 at the United Nations High Level Meeting (UNHLM) on TB, countries signed a Political Declaration, and made a promise to put 30 million people on TB preventive treatment (TPT) by 2022, which includes 6 million PLHIV, 4 million children under five years old and 20 million other household contacts of TB patients.

Dr Suvanand Sahu, Deputy Executive Director, Stop TB Partnership, stressed upon having a sense of urgency to move fast towards ending TB. He sees hope in the Call To Action launched at the TB HIV Symposium for a coordinated HIV and TB response to reach 6 million people living with HIV with tuberculosis preventive treatment. While conceding that the UN High Level Meeting (UNHLM) on TB, which happened in September 2018, increased the political attention that TB deserved, Dr Suvanand Sahu emphasized upon three main action points: (i) increasing domestic resources, especially in high TB burden countries (ii) finding those people with TB who have been missed in the past and (iii) making leaders, politicians and heads of countries accountable for the TB response in their areas in terms of key indicators, targets and commitments made.

Ending TB by 2030 will not be possible without addressing this reservoir of people infected with latent TB by providing them with TB preventive treatment (TPT) to substantially reduce the probability of progression from latent TB infection to active TB disease.

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Outlook
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