

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



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The Militants' Internal Divisions

The Taliban has published an audio message attributed to the group's leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, denying reports of his death in a gunfight during a meeting in Pakistan. Media reports in recent days suggested a gunfight among Taliban rival groups during a gathering in Quetta city of Pakistan in which it was alleged he was seriously wounded. The audio message, which is believed to be Mullah Mansoor's voice, is not verified by any independent source or the government; however, it still may prove right in near future. The leader of the main Taliban faction may have escaped death at the Quetta meeting. But the gunfight ensuing the high-profile meeting at the house of a senior Taliban commander suggest profound troubles in the Taliban senior leadership.

This incident represents a profound division among different factions of the Taliban. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour was elected as the new leader of the group after the death of Mullah Mohammed Omar in late July this year. In the wake of announcement of Mullah Omar's death, influential mediators failed in trying to mediate over the next leadership of the Taliban. Mullah Rassoul finally was imposed as new leader by ostensibly a majority of the Taliban senior members. At the time, some key members of the Taliban announced their opposition to the leadership of Mullah Mansoor. The foundation of the splinter group led by Mullah Rassoul marked formal split of the united Taliban which fought the US-led coalition and the Afghan government over last fourteen years.

The split was also a major blow to the leadership of Mullah Mansoor and the Taliban as a whole; which had remained intact during the last over a decade of the insurgency in Afghanistan. Taliban showed concerted efforts in recent months to consolidate the leadership of the group around the new leader while the group waged a bloody campaign on the ground against rival groups such as the Islamic State and the Mullah Rassoul's faction.

The intense clashes between the main Taliban group led by Mullah Mansoor and other militant groups opposing Mullah Mansoor's leadership has left dozens of militants dead. The war of the Taliban once targeting the government of Afghanistan and the US-led coalition forces now is redirecting into a dual conflict of internal fighting and the insurgency against the government. With the simmering divisions among senior Taliban members, the authority of the new leader seems to be eroding over the many loose factions of Taliban, which could easily diverge directions from the main group.

Mullah Akhtar Mansoor is allegedly a pro-peace talks figure among the Taliban who allegedly had been supporting talks with the Afghan government. The government of Afghanistan spared no efforts to bring the main Taliban group to negotiation table and strike a peace deal with the Taliban. With the internal divisions among the Taliban leaving the Taliban leader bruised, his future role in leadership of the main insurgent group and the fate of the peace efforts is being undermined. If the Taliban continues to disintegrate, it will get harder for the Afghan government to direct the peace talks with the militant groups. The government of Afghanistan seems to be facing a dilemma of the insurgent groups.

On one hand, different militant players in the country will make it much harder to seek a viable peace with the insurgent groups. While on the other hand split of the Taliban could potentially weaken the insurgency in Afghanistan and make the ground ready for Afghan forces to win the war through military means. Further disintegration of the Taliban will potentially derail the peace talks once started between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

The future of the Taliban will be defined by both development of the infighting among the group and the peace and war efforts by the Afghan government. The infighting among the Taliban factions will possibly further intensify, and as a result, the Taliban may start evolving into smaller warring factions. Such development will further complicate the ongoing war efforts against the insurgent groups as well as the efforts to start a peace process with the Taliban. All evidences on the ground suggest that the government of Afghanistan will not be able to enter peace talks with a spectrum of insurgent groups and secure a peace deal that could end the conflict in the country. The Afghan government needs to intensify the crackdown on the militant groups along with exploring resumption of peace talks with the Taliban and other insurgent groups.



On Tackling Joblessness in Afghanistan!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

A few days ago, I watched interview of a senior government official who was trying his best to hide the inactiveness of government regarding the soaring unemployment in the country and giving strange and funny explanations and excuses in this regard. The said official was a senior official in the ministry of youth affairs and he was called to talk about the worsening situation of unemployment in the country given the fact it was the prime factor behind the disappointment of youth from the country and their future and were heading to face all the difficulties to reach to European states. According to the said official, 'Here, our youngsters feel embarrassed to do pity works like cleaning, dishwashing and others but they do happily the same work in European countries.' His next important weapon was the use of feeling of patriotism and whenever he felt himself answerless, he would revert to his typical words, 'We need to show sacrifice to the country as this country has given us a lot and now is our turn to give back to this country. Countries are never built in favorable conditions but great nations have always built their countries by facing the adverse conditions.'

More or less is the case with the announcement of government to develop employment opportunities for the jobless people. The President made this announcement after much pressure from public and media that unemployment is giving birth to so many other problems like uncertainty about the future of the country, increase in crime rates, and others. In the first phase of this plan, thousands of jobs will be created in which Afghan youths will clean the cities and towns. This project has been initially planned for some major cities, which will be later extended to all other cities and towns of the country.

The idea has been taken from that of the United States after the Great Depression of 1930s in which American economy experienced its worst recession and unemployment skyrocketed. In response to this, American government came into action and established large numbers of arms factories in which thousands of jobs were created and economic activities started pumping blood into the body of the American economy. With this, American economy started its recovery and then became the biggest economy of the world. But it was lucky for them that in 1939, the Second World War started and the idea of establishing weapons factories turned out to be a perfect decision. When the war ended in 1945, the American economy had already recovered and it was no more dependent on the weapons industry. As a part of this campaign, a wave of construction-based activities will start with the financial and technical support of our neighboring friend country of China. According to the media reports, China will build ten thousand apartments in a number of cities in Afghanistan and this will give rise to a new wave of economic activities in the country. It will generate job opportunities to thousands of people and many other directly or indirectly related industries will benefit from the project. At the same time, it will provide cheaper houses to thousands of Afghans and will bring down the prices of houses and apartments in the country. Comparing to the first idea of cleaning the cities, this idea seems to be more meaningful as it will involve not only illiterate labor but will also involve en-

gineers and technical people from different fields. This project is also self-sustaining as these apartments can be then sold to people and it will provide capital to restart the cycle and invest in similar projects in the country. However, it remains a fact that in last 14 years of democracy, construction was the most corrupt business in which millions of dollars were wasted and it is the reason that newly paved roads broke down in a span of few years and the standard of construction of buildings in the country was really unsatisfactory. There were number of black-listed construction companies that stole millions of dollars of public money and majority of them belonged to the most rich and powerful families who are also present at high positions in the government. It must be made sure that the whole process should be transparent and there should be vigilant check and balance so that this project should not be the victim of corruption and it should not hurt the trust of republic of China who have come forward to help the country in its critical conditions. When visiting shops and markets, we realize that there are hundreds or even thousands of products that are imported from other countries but these products can be easily manufactured in the country. It is needed that a detailed study should be carried out that should find out what products can be manufactured in the country that we are at present importing from other countries and then government should work to establish factories where these products should be manufactured. It is the responsibility of government to establish factories so that people should get more and more jobs. Factories are also the sustainable and long-lasting factors of an economy while cleanliness campaigns can only bring temporary economic activities and it can soon eat away the funds of government, which is not the case with factories and industries.

It is also unfortunate that on one hand, we cry about joblessness and on the other, government and its concerned ministry and offices never show any seriousness to make the conditions favorable for a new factory or business. Afghanistan is still one of the most difficult countries to establish a new business or run a business. Flagrant corruption and bribe-acceptance is the main reason that people are hesitant to invest in the country. In the last 14 years, thousands of Afghans or foreigners brought their money to establish factories in the country but they got disappointed having a look at the difficult conditions to do business. On the other hand, numerous countries not only make starting a new business easy but they also provide businessmen with numerous benefits and incentives so that more and more investors should be attracted. In Afghanistan, it is exact opposite; here, all the efforts are made so that a person should be disappointed and pack his business. In the same way, the security conditions in the country are a big question mark in this regard. Until and unless the government does not make efforts to bring peace and stability in the country, dreaming of new businesses and creating job opportunities would remain an impossible task to be achieved. After the given steps are taken, government can expect actual and sustainable business and employment opportunities in the country and would not be dependent on those projects that are both baseless and illogical.

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Big Lessons on Climate Change from A Small Country

By Annette Dixon

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

The mountain kingdom of Bhutan may not seem an obvious place to look for lessons on addressing climate change. But on a recent visit here I was impressed with how much this small country has achieved and also with its ambition. Bhutan has much to teach South Asia and the wider world.

These lessons are especially relevant as the world negotiates in Paris a new pact on climate change at the International Climate Change Summit, known as COP21, which we all hope will move the global economy to a low carbon and more resilient path.

The talks aim to agree this month on a way to keep global warming to a maximum of 2 degrees celsius from pre-industrial era levels. There is widespread agreement that going above this threshold would have serious consequences.

South Asia is among the regions of the world that is likely to be most affected by climate change. We are already experiencing this. There is increasing variability of the monsoon rainfall, more heavy rainfalls such as those that caused the recent flooding in India, and an increase in the number of droughts.

A World Bank report in 2013 predicted that even if the warming climate was kept at 2 degrees then this could threaten the lives of the millions of people in South Asia. The region's dense urban populations face extreme heat, flooding, and disease and millions of its people could be trapped in poverty. Droughts could especially affect north-western India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

These are big problems. They may look much bigger than anything Bhutan, a very small country in a populous region, can teach South Asia and the world. But I see three lessons.

Firstly, a commitment to ambitious goals will be critical to save the world from climate disaster. To stop the world from warming too much, climate experts estimate that global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by up to 70 percent by 2050. Carbon neutrality (zero emissions) must be achieved within this century.

Bhutan declared in 2009 that it would remain carbon neutral and has made the most ambitious pledges on cutting emissions

at COP21, according to Britain's Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit think tank. It is carbon neutral already because of its vast forests absorbing carbon emissions. But staying neutral as emissions from industry and transport rapidly rise will not be easy. It will require aggressively maintaining its tree cover and finding ways to grow economically in a carbon neutral or reduced way. To achieve this, the Royal Government of Bhutan has embedded its commitment to maintain its forest cover at more than 60 percent.

Secondly, mainstreaming comprehensive climate change measures across the economy is the way to go. The alternative of a case-by-case approach will result in gains in one area that are negated by setbacks in others. For example, there is no point in building a solar park with photovoltaic cells that are manufactured in a factory powered by coal.

Bhutan has taken the approach of mainstreaming climate change and resilience in policies on disaster risk management and weather monitoring, water-related services, agriculture, urban transport, Information and communications technology (ICT), hydropower, and forest management. In ICT, for example, Bhutan is positioning itself as the country of green, reliable energy to attract private green investment and jobs.

Thirdly, there are big potential wins in the fight against climate change from cooperating with neighbors. This could even save lives. With the earth warming, the number of natural disasters are increasing. In the past two decades, over 50 percent of South Asians (more than 800 million people) have been affected by at least one natural disaster. South Asian countries can gain from cooperating on disasters that stem from shared climate change-related challenges.

When I was in Bhutan I announced a new weather and disaster improvement project to expand weather forecasting and natural disaster early warning in Bhutan and the South Asia region. I also announced a pilot program for climate resilience that has the potential for considerable expansion.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our era. But an approach that includes a commitment to ambitious goals, mainstreaming climate change measures, and cooperating with neighbors, could lead to real progress.

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