

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



January 13, 2016

## Changing TUTAP Route

For a heterogenous society like Afghanistan it is really important that justice and fair-play should be safeguarded as much as possible. Different sections and people of such a society expect that they are properly treated and their rights are protected. Justice should treat every one equally and should never turn against the minorities. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has been largely influenced by instability and civil wars, that have even resulted in certain communal rifts and there have been many opportunists who have taken advantages of such rifts. Therefore, it is really important that the communal rifts should not be promulgated again and there should be efforts to nip it in the bud.

As now, Afghanistan is a democratic country and its system is based on justice and fair-play it is really important that the different development projects that are pursued in the country must benefit all equally. Equal and just development of the society will definitely play a massive role in rooting out the concerns and grievances and bring the people together.

It is basically one of the major issues in Afghanistan that different districts and provinces are not able to receive the benefits of the developments that have been or are being made. Mostly, the rural parts of the country are not able to see the facilities of life approach to them. They are, therefore, neglected and they develop different types of grievances.

So, the development projects both by the government and the NGOs must keep in consideration that all parts of the country regardless of who live their get equal shares. If a project is implemented at a place just because people from a particular community live there and the intend is also to give that community an advantage over the others, it would be a great injustice and may not serve its purpose, because, ultimately, it is only the harmonious development of the country as a whole that can generate positive results.

For Afghanistan it is vital to pursue this golden rule of justice and equal development. Unfortunately, it has not been able to do so as yet. Though, the government as a whole does not intend it, there are some opportunists who always want to satiate their thirst of narrow-mindedness and communal inclinations. They are the ones who think that they are performing service to their people, but by doing so they only manage to grow the seeds of civil wars that will ultimately bring disorder and misery to everyone alike.

It is really vital that different provinces in Afghanistan must benefit from all sorts of developments. Particularly, the central highlands must be given attention in this regard as the negligence from the relevant authorities have made the residents live their lives in a very miserable condition. Most of the districts in this region do not have the basic requirements of life at all. There is shortage of food, particularly, during the cold weather. No proper arrangement for clean drinking water can be found. No considerable opportunities for education can be found. The roads are not constructed. There is no electricity and health facilities. And, more unfortunate fact is that there are no tangible plans as well to work for all these requirements. Even the projects that may benefit this region indirectly are being moved to other parts of the country.

The example of TUTAP project is very much relevant in this regard. TUTAP is one of the important regional economic projects agreed among Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan (TUTAP) which is expected to be extended to Pakistan through Afghanistan with a transmission capacity of 500MW power from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and other south Asian countries specially Pakistan. The German Fischer Co carried out a survey on this project that has already drafted power master plan of China, Pakistan and other countries. According to this survey, Bamyan is the best route for TUTAP project, due to its available reliable security and its common borders with north east and northern provinces. According to officials of Fischer Co, Bamyan is a safe and cheap course for extension of TUTAP project. However, the recommendations from Fischer Co. is now being ignored and there are considerations to change the route and adopt Salang pass. This change of route is not advisable as it would both increase the cost and the risks to the project.

Vice President Mohammad Sarwar Danish has also voiced concerns regarding the implementation of the project through Salang pass, insisting that the multi-million dollar project could be jeopardized with devastating Salang risks and ignoring the recommendations of the consulting companies which sketched the master plan of the project. He wrote a letter to Ministry of Energy and Water and Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, and called for technical approach to implement the project and consider the needs of the residents of the central provinces for their access to electricity. Ignoring the factors like cost, security, technicality and feasibility, and changing the route for TUTAP project would mean an injustice; an injustice, to ignore people from a particular community and benefit others.

# The Opportunities for Peace in Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

The quadrilateral talks in Islamabad for establishing a roadmap for peace process in Afghanistan ended with the participants agreeing on continuing the talks for exploring ways to resume negotiations between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. According to officials, the next four-way meeting of representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US would be held in Kabul next week. The statement released at the end of the meeting said that the participants of the meeting emphasized on ending the violence and resumption of peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The meeting of the quadrilateral coordination group in Islamabad is coming as a major development for the Afghan peace efforts after the previous direct talks between the two sides failed last year.

Afghanistan and Pakistan hope the meeting would result to reach a common ground on key issues of peace talks among key stakeholders particularly Kabul and Islamabad. The statement said that the talks in Islamabad were focused on "clear and realistic assessment" of opportunities for peace in Afghanistan as well as the hurdles for talks with the Taliban. Reaching a common ground by Afghanistan and Pakistan over the process would be key for success of talks with the Taliban. The previous efforts between Afghanistan and Pakistan aimed at reaching a common ground over the process have so far been unproductive. The most notable achievement from the ongoing talks would be a substantial understanding between Kabul and Islamabad over the process and a likely peace deal between the government and the Taliban.

There are much ambiguities involved with the efforts for starting peace talks with the Taliban as there is not a clear understanding between Kabul and Islamabad over the conditions of the process. The Afghan and Pakistani governments need to talk over all aspects of the peace process with the Taliban as well as expectations of Kabul and Islamabad from the peace process and a likely deal with the Taliban. The process to conclude the pre-peace talks negotiations between the four key parties may take a long time; however, it would remain crucial a prerequisite for resumption of negotiations between Taliban leaders and the Afghan government. Pakistan has hinted its commitment to take action against those Taliban factions who do not enter in peace negotiations. If Kabul and Islamabad do not reach a clear understanding on what circumstances the Pakistani side would take military action against the Taliban, this would result to further disappointments between the two sides. Pakistan needs to remain committed to its obligations and act upon its promises it makes to the Afghan government. There have been always major differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan over security in Afghanistan and issues related to peace talks with the Taliban. Pakistan is seen as having control over the Taliban and would have a major role in the peace talks with the group in the

future. Afghanistan insists circles in the powerful military and intelligence of Pakistan are supporting the Taliban to mount their campaign of violence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's links with the Taliban would remain a tricky issue in the ongoing talks between the two countries for drawing a roadmap for the peace negotiations with the Taliban. Afghanistan and Pakistan both holds long-standing skepticisms against each other which fails the two sides to talk frankly over the trickiest issues related to peace and stability in both the countries. And they seem now to take the initial steps for reaching such understandings. It would be a major success for the prospect of the peace in Afghanistan if the Afghan and Pakistani governments reach important agreements, or broad understanding, for the peace process.

The presence of two major world players China and the US is viewed as a milestone for the talks to pave the way for negotiations with the Taliban. The United States and China both have considerable influence over the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan as both are major supporters of the Afghan government, and both are key allies of Pakistan. Pakistan expects the Afghan government to reduce influence of anti-Pakistan elements in Kabul over the relations between the two countries and curb the impacts of their hardline stance over the peace process. In the meantime, Pakistan has long been skeptical of Afghanistan's expanding relations with India, an archrival of Pakistan. This is while India has been a key regional supporter of Afghanistan, and the country has contributed billions of dollars in development of Afghanistan. The government of Afghanistan sees India's role indispensable to development of Afghanistan.

Any objective assessment of the opportunities for peace talks would need to "clearly and realistically" consider all these issues between the two countries which are directly related to peace talks with the Taliban. Pakistan and Afghanistan need to make compromises over the terms of the peace process and the conditions of a likely peace deal with the Taliban. The Afghan government will need to consider political concessions and some sort of power-sharing with the Taliban to end the bloody conflict in the country. However, all parties including Pakistan and the Taliban will need to realize that the Afghan constitution is not up to any talks and Afghanistan's sovereignty and integrity must be respected. On other hand, the Afghanistan cannot make any compromises over its relations with India or any other countries as it violates integrity and long-term interests of Afghanistan. However, in order to ease Pakistan's skepticisms, Afghanistan will be able to establish balanced relations with India as it needs to have balanced and friendly relations with both the South Asian countries.

It would best for interests of Afghanistan and Pakistan to curb influence of circles in both countries that pursue agendas against another country. This way the two countries would be able to start restoring trusts in the mutual relations and in the joint efforts for the Afghan peace talks.

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## The Victory of Cricket Team!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

At a time when we keep hearing about frightening things in our country like bomb explosions, suicide attacks, militants' clash with our security forces and even earthquakes, there is very less to cheer about. In such circumstances, any good news can work as an elixir for the morale of this nation that is in dire need of such optimistic news. In last few months, hopelessness and pessimism has emerged as our biggest enemy, which is forcing our youth to flee out of the country and is chopping down the hopes of those who are left behind. This hopelessness got its birth due to a number of factors like lawlessness, increasing influence of militants and Taliban in different parts of the country, soaring inflation and unemployment and others. However, the situation can only be tackled by good news and it was provided very recently by the victory of our cricket team against Zimbabwe. This series of five one-day internationals and two T20s was so eagerly followed, watched and celebrated by our entire nation that it allowed them to forget their miseries and hopelessness for a few days and filled them with energy and enthusiasm. Large numbers of our Afghans had gone to UAE to support their team in the ground and cherish their joys on the spot. Similarly, when our cricket team returned to Kabul, they were welcomed and greeted like heroes and thousands of people thronged around them. People showered their joys and respect to them in form of chants, flowers and sweets and taking pictures with them.

Although for the cricketing nations, the victory against Zimbabwe might not mean a lot but it was a historic moment in the cricket of our country that a non-test playing nation was able to knock down a test-playing nation in both one-day and T20 series. The recent win of our national cricket team against Zimbabwe not only surprised the cricketing pundits but it also paved the way for Afghan team to be included among the test playing nations. Afghan cricketers, the coach, team management and everyone involved deserves appreciation and gratefulness. When Afghan team won the final ODI against Zimbabwe and were given the winning trophy, it was a night of jubilation and celebration for Afghanistan. Large numbers of youngsters came out to the streets, with national flags in their hands and dancing on the national songs. Last time, such jubilation was seen in 2013 when Afghan football team won the final of Asian Cup against India.

However, the joy of this occasion was slightly tarnished by intense firing in air. Although there has been no report of anyone being injured by this firing, however, it was criticized by many as not a proper act to be done by a civilized nation. One of national team players also gave a message on the media to avoid firing in air so that there should not be any unhappy incident.

Having a look at history, it is not difficult to understand why people were extraordinarily jubilant. These were the youngsters who were born in war and air filled with noise of shooting and bombing and from many decades, had seen nothing except war, bloodshed, and its resultant depression and fear. In all these years, they never had any such moment to enjoy and celebrate. In all these years, they had never received any good news and had never felt so much proud on being an Afghan.

This occasion was special in a sense that it made them forget their worries for a while and get new energy to have hopes from the future of Afghanistan.

Like other nations of the world, we also have some divisions based on different ethnicities but this victory worked as an ointment to heal and finish all the rifts and divides present among the people. At that night, they were all together as Afghans. There was no discrimination of Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, Uzbek or others. They were all waving with love and respect the flag of Afghanistan and shouting passionately 'Long Live Afghanistan' and 'Long Live Afghan Team'. Even with such crowd and rush, there was no fight between the people and that night, no one was ready to get angry and it was absolutely dedicated for smiling and spreading this smile. In a sense, relations and unity between all the Afghans were strengthened and I hope that, there would be many such occasions in future which will wipe away our differences and disunity. Afghanistan has always been regarded a country where there is fight, there is terrorism, there are bomb blasts and suicide attacks and there is general insecurity. In the international media, Afghanistan has always been portrayed as a country where there is instability and conflict. This image has become so permanent that it would take many years' efforts before Afghanistan is known for peace, progress and stability. Our victory and its following celebrations gave a message to the people of world that a country is rising out of conflict and bloodshed and is slowly and gradually advancing towards peace and stability.

While the celebrations continued that night, a comment given on Facebook especially caught my interest and attention. It said, 'Our politicians and so-called leaders, who have accumulated millions of dollars from this country, could never provide us with an occasion that could have lifted up the spirits of nation as whole while a bunch of players, who are happy in their limited income, showed performance that changed the mood and spirit of nation.' On this great occasion as well, some of the so-called and pessimistic analysts once again tried to wet blankets and came up with some stupid remarks. It was said that cricket is not the game of our country, it is played by a team in which some players are Pakistanis or the boys have learned this game in Pakistan, the present coach of our team is also a Pakistani cricketer and we need not to be so much happy on it. However, a number of wise members of our media silenced these stupid analysts. First of all, the coach of Afghan national cricket team, Inzamam-ul-Haq is Pakistani but every credit goes to him that after he was selected as the coach of our cricket team, our team has shown remarkable progress and has emerged as one of the most successful cricket teams in the world. We need to admire his hard work and sincerity with his job without considering his background or nationality. In the same way, even if these boys have learned cricket in Pakistan, they have brought smiles on the faces of all Afghans and has brought fame to the country.

It is needed that the efforts of players and the coach should be acknowledged and appreciated officially as they did the miraculous work that no politician or so-called leaders could have done.

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