

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

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### Prioritizing Education Analogous to Investing on Human Resource

The role of education for joint uplift of a nation is irrefutably central. No development is possible without a skillful and trained human resource. Through education, more skilled people can be produced who can contribute in recreation and development of the country. A sound economy serves the basis of development and progress, can not grow until citizens do not understand the economic progress of a country. It is education that helps the man to understand and protect environment for healthy atmosphere. It helped the world transform from barren land into bejeweled dreamland.

The collective socio-economic and political advances of a nation are determined by the degree of concentration diverted to improve its literacy graph and the amount of resources allocated to this preliminary societal need. A nation reaches to prominence, turn unbeatable and matchless, only when greater intrepid steps are taken to eliminate illiteracy by declaring the state of educational emergency. The profound significance of education in societal ascend is established undisputed, contrary to being failed to inspire our politicians.

Unluckily, we inhabit a society where people in twenty first century deem modern contradictory to Islamic teachings. Formerly, Taliban reiterated their support to education in Afghanistan given in a proper environment in line with Islamic instructions was set in. "Parents should not to enroll their children to schools funded by Christians," Taliban warned. None is defiant of the fact, Taliban talks of education, promoting violence, bloodshed, butchery and mass killing of innocents on biased religious grounds given they have attacked several schools. It is worth mentioning what they interpret is the utter negation of gist of Islamic induction. President Ashraf Ghani has called on the Taliban and other armed opposition groups to stop attacking schools which they say is against Islam. Ghani strongly criticized attacks on schools, saying that depriving children from education was an enmity with Islam and the people of Afghanistan.

Aiming to put Afghanistan on the course of endemic upheaval and turmoil, Taliban's advice suffices. It is evident that education can function as a root cause and feeder of conflict, with the potential to retrench ethnic/religious divides and other societal cleavages. It is right for the world and us to worry about the impact of Afghanistan's dysfunctional educational system especially when it has been demonstrated that poorly educated young men in a country as large as Afghanistan pose a serious complication country itself.

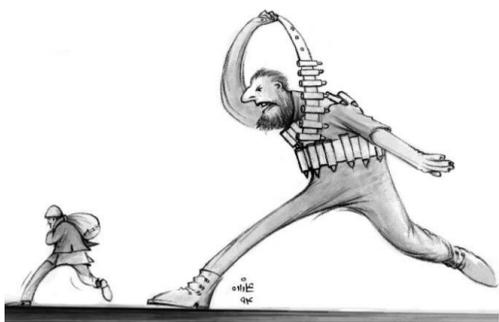
Following the reinstatement of democracy in Afghanistan, some degree betterment is observed which is not appreciable but satisfactory. By 2006, over 4 million male and female students were enrolled in schools throughout Afghanistan. By 2013 there were 10.5 million students attending schools in Afghanistan, a country with a population of around 27.5 million people. There has been remarkable success in recent years in rebuilding it. This year, more than 1.2 million people are expected to attend schools, of which, 41 percent are girls. There at the same time school facilities or institutions were also being refurbished or improved, with more modern-style schools being built each year. However, there is still great number of students who yet are deprived of education. It is said nearly half the children and young people of school age still do not attend school.

The notoriety does not end here; the teacher deficiency and incompetence is another obstacle hindering the way to progress. There are about 200,000 teachers serving these students. For the coming years, more than 110,000 additional teachers are still needed for primary and secondary schools. Reportedly, there only about a quarter of the teachers have the requisite qualifications. According to statistics owned by the Ministry of Education, 80 percent of the country's 165,000 teachers had achieved the equivalent of a high school education or did not complete their post-secondary studies.

This is true to run literary program; institutes equipped with every requisite stand crucial. Till date there are insufficient schools particularly in the most remote part of the country. It was reported in 2013 that there were 16,000 schools across Afghanistan, with 10.5 million students. There are 40 percent of schools were conducted in permanent buildings. According to report of Education Ministry there are 3 million children remained deprived of education and requested \$3 billion to construct 8,000 additional schools over next two years. Aside to the aforesaid facts, a glance at our deserted national priorities disheartens us of interminable irrational and abrupt priorities which happens to be mostly influential than inspirational. The undertakings executed under the influence of forged circumstances than national priorities yield not, the desired result based on national interest.

Afghanistan's spending on education is not enough seeing the magnitude of illiteracy. The remedy is to increase the proportion of public resources going into education. If tax-to-GDP ratio cannot be increased, the state should be willing to divert resources from sectors with lower priority towards education. The donor community has been prepared to help with funds when it is not feared that domestic resources were constrained to allow for an increase in public sector expenditure on education. The obvious solution is to invest in teacher training, building infrastructure for educational institutes, reforming the curriculum and improving the quality of textbooks that should be deficient of religio-ethnic biases.

It is high time we should spend greater resources building human resources. Undeniably, no nation can survive and succeed without quality or modern education, given it builds the nations and become the cause of prosperity it gives the path that leads towards bright future.



## The Battle of Economic Dominance

By Asmatyari

Sound and growing economy serves the basis of sustainable and sunwavered development of an every nation state. The dream to turn unbeatable is achieved by making heavy investments on education, infrastructure, governance, defense and law and order, which is sought via economic riches. Endurably, an unflinching diplomatic tie, at this very stage, plays pivotal role in turning this dream reality. It is judicious that states tied with the bonds of mutual interest, confidence and reliability only succeeds to linger in the lifelong relation.

The geopolitical location of Afghanistan is quite a lot promising, given it can bridge the world over with Central Asian; earthen resource rich countries and China; one of potentially growing economy of the world. Many countries therefore, exercise great deal of diplomacy to straighten their affairs or find out a better alternative to reap these resources and goods. India; another giant economy of Asia foresees way out to reach out to energy reserves of Central Asia, meeting its energy requirements and keeping pace with industrial developments.

Afghanistan enjoys comparatively good trade relation with neighboring Pakistan. Both the states share superb deal of transportation of goods from one to other country. In this perspective Pakistan and Afghanistan tied in Transit Trade Agreement (also known as APTTA), which is a bilateral trade agreement between the two neighbors has been renegotiated several times, with the most recent version signed on October 28, 2010. This treaty allows Afghanistan access to the dry port of Lahore, and also access to a land route to export goods to India. It does not allow India to use the land route to export goods to Afghanistan. The bilateral trade between the two countries has increased from \$830.2 million in 2006-07 to \$2.5 billion in 2010-11 due to non commercial goods but then declined in the subsequent years. Bilaterally formal trade is increasing but informal trade is higher than formal trade. Pak-Afghan agrees to enhance bilateral trade to \$5 billion by 2015.

With exception to goods' trade Afghanistan can reap the fruit of service in different areas of human endeavors. Undoubtedly, Pakistan has earned a good reputation in the area of trade in services, in banking and insurance, telecommunications; IT enabled services, engineering consultancy, architecture and accountancy. Afghanistan would need expertise in these areas both for current operations and 'on the job' training of their own young professionals.

In the coming years, Afghanistan should negotiate free trade and bilateral investment agreements with Pakistan by ensuring duty free trade. In the medium term, the two countries should form a common customs union with the external tariffs at ports of entry and thereafter the goods can move freely between the two countries.

The same principle applies to rest of countries in the neighborhood of Afghanistan. India, China and central Asian countries are equally important from economic point of view. Afghanistan and central Asian countries render to be a feasibly sound market for Indian goods that strives hard to seek entry in these markets via land routes through Pakistan. Nonetheless, the battered political relation Pakistan undergoes with India has equally undermined this relationship.

Both Pakistan and India accuses each other of insecurity in the two

states. This allegation and counter allegation inflicted worst impact on Afghanistan trade relation with two states. It has therefore to exercise balanced diplomacy with two disgruntled, one friend and other ally. In order to placate Pakistan growing concern about Afghanistan greater inclination towards India, earlier President Ghani suspended a request by the Afghan government to purchase heavy arms from India, of which Pakistan has long been wary. Moreover, he has also offered Pakistani investors generous access to Afghanistan, including free industrial zones. In November, the Afghan and Pakistani governments agreed to a detailed list of proposals to promote trade, including the opening of 15 new crossing points along their shared border, even though Afghanistan has long disputed its legitimacy.

Undoubtedly, the irresolute relationship between Pakistan and India battered the transition of goods from Afghanistan to India and from India back to Afghanistan. At present, Pakistan allows Afghan trucks carrying goods meant for India only up to its last checkpoint at Wagah and not to the Indian checkpoint at Attari which is just less than a kilometer away. Kabul insists that APTTA should allow Afghan trucks to carry Afghan products to the huge markets of India and China as well as the rest of the world through the seaports and land routes of Pakistan. Afghanistan asserts the Transit Trade Agreement should be extended and it should display resilience letting India join the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTITA) to promote trade in the region. This assertion was witnessed, during president's former visit to India where he underlined Afghan-India trade ties, immensely important.

It's feared the Af-Pak trade and political ties tarnishes in the days to come, in the wake of consistent denial of access to Afghan and Central Asian markets through Pakistan, India will go with Chahbahar port of Iran. This proposition took prior space in former Modhi and Ghani talks. India already has waged to invest a handsome sum of \$200 million for developing Iran's Chahbahar port. The opening of the port to Afghan commerce is expected to improve direct trade between Afghanistan and India as well as open up new revenue streams associated with the flow of Indian goods through Afghanistan into Central Asia and back into India. This development might render unconvincing for Pakistan, hence eroding in one way or other the Af-Pak trade agreement and other ties.

Based on an agreement signed between Iran and India, in addition to New Delhi's investment in developing modern trade and commerce infrastructure at Chahbahar port, a new shipping route will be established for trade between India and Afghanistan. This development doesn't conform neither with Pakistan's interest nor China's who have ventured to functionalize Gawadar port at the earliest to reap out the fruits of entire developments in economic hub of Asia.

In the accounts of all developments, Afghanistan still secure central role, given the road to giant central Asian countries go through the land of opportunity, the Afghanistan. Pakistan, India and Afghanistan have to normalize its entire affairs and seek for economic superiority via free market and free and duty free trade policies turning Asia economic giant. In this pursuit they have to ensure security and better ties by doing away with terrorism, extremism and militancy.

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## The Battle for the Northern Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

In recent days, the Afghan army and police forces have launched a new round of counter-insurgency operation in Kunduz province to drive the militants out of the areas they have taken in more than past two weeks. As fierce fighting is going, dozens of Taliban and a number of army casualties are reported. According to local officials, more than 14,000 families have been displaced as result of the ongoing battle in the province. The ongoing counter-insurgency in Kunduz province has developed as a full-scale war between the Taliban militants and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) for control of the Kunduz and surrounding provinces. The Taliban focus this year in the Northern provinces is largely a different war strategy sought by the Taliban compared to the previous offensives of the militants.

The militants' resistance against Afghan army and police forces has been formidable. Since a year ago, the Taliban started bolstering their presence in many districts of Kunduz province including Dasht-i-Archi, Chahar Darreh, Khanabad and Imam Sahib. Since then, as the reports suggest, thousands of militant fighters have infiltrated to the far remote and isolated areas of the province where they enjoy relatively large support from local residents. The Taliban fighters fighting on the ground in the province are so resistant that it has made it very difficult for the ANSF to retake the grounds taken by the Taliban. Despite taking many villages from the Taliban in Kunduz, the militants still have dominant presence not only in many districts of the province but also in surrounding areas of the Kunduz city.

The Taliban offensive in many Northern provinces is in fact a new war strategy by the Taliban focusing on shift of war ground from south to the north. There have been many reasons for the Taliban to expand the war into the Northern provinces. First, the government had relatively weak military presence and security coverage in the Northern parts of the country. For most of the past fourteen years of the anti-insurgency, the southern and eastern provinces have been the battlefield of war between the militant groups in and the US-led NATO forces along with the ANSF. As result of this, all military focus has been on the most volatile provinces in the south and east, which had left the north particularly vulnerable. As a group that has fought for the last fourteen years, the Taliban are not inept in taking advantage of the Afghan government's security vulnerabilities. As the ANSF have been mostly busy with securing the last year elections, the militant groups identified security gaps across the country and prepared for taking advantage of it.

However, one of the main reasons of the Taliban's unprecedented war focus on Northern provinces is the proximity of the area to Central Asian States. According to the reports, many foreign fighters, including women, have been killed in recent days of the ANSF offensive in Kunduz province. Local officials have said that foreign militants including Chechens and Uzbeks have been fighting along with the Taliban

militants. It seems that the Taliban have teamed up their forces in Northern provinces with foreign nationals mostly from the Caucasus and the Central Asia. Previously it was claimed that hundreds of militants had sheltered on the Afghan side of the border with Turkmenistan, planning to open a new front in the long-lasting war.

Many of the foreign militants fighting alongside the Taliban aim to establish a safe haven in the northern Afghanistan so to promote their insurgency in their home countries. It is feared that if the issue is not dealt seriously, some most insecure areas of the North could turn into a back door hub for terrorists of Central Asian States origin. With the escalation of the militants' activities in the northern Kunduz provinces, many MPs and security analysts warned that if the government fails to beef up the Afghan army in the North, a number of the Northern provinces will further plunge into insecurity and violence. In recent months, Russian and Central Asian States officials have warned of the Northern Afghanistan becoming more insecure and threatening the Central Asia. If it is the scenario of Taliban teaming up with foreign militants, the militant groups would certainly further focus on finding a foothold in northern Afghanistan so as to create a new safe haven for foreign militants such as North Waziristan.

However, there are also other possible scenarios for the militant groups targeting the Northern provinces this year. The war waged in the north may be a diversion strategy by the militants so to drag the ANSF resources to the North and then open a new front which they aim in the south or east of the country. For most part of the last fourteen years of war, the Taliban have been fighting the war in the south and east of the country mostly with limited or no gains for the group. Expansion of the war into the Northern provinces and opening a new front for the ANSF could provide the group the opportunity to quickly start the already-fought war in the southern provinces such as the restive Helmand province. In provinces like Helmand, the Taliban enjoy relatively more support from the locals and easily spread the war while remaining engaged in the North.

The Taliban have had considerable gain through expanding the war in vulnerable provinces of the North. It is a key test for the ANSF to effective counter the obvious new war strategy by the Taliban. There is a chance for the Taliban to join forces with other minor terrorist groups including the Uzbeks, Chechens and the growing Islamic State group to bolster their presence against the ANSF as it is the common enemy for all the militant groups. Recently the Afghan President's National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar, warned that the Islamic State group has particular interest for taking ground in Afghanistan. Given the military offensive in Pakistan and the recent geostrategic changes in the region and beyond, it is quite probable for various militant groups to struggle for finding a safe haven in Northern Afghanistan.

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