

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

Daily Outlook

AFGHANISTAN

The Leading Independent Newspaper

May 10, 2016

China has Reiterated its Support for Afghanistan

China has once again reiterated its support for Afghanistan and in a joint seminar on "One Road One Belt" where senior Afghan officials and the Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan, Yao Jing, participated, it was revealed that the two countries may sign agreements on security and economic cooperation in near future under the initiative of One Road One Belt.

One Road One Belt basically refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is gaining support and acceptance in the Eurasian and Southeast Asian nations and is believed to be a vital route for growing businesses in the region. As Afghanistan is a channel connecting Central Asia and South Asia, it has a vital role in the project, therefore, it can benefit to a large extent from it.

Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, said in the seminar, "If the idea of One Belt One Road can be successfully implemented, it would open up the old economic routes in Asia. Afghanistan as an ancient economic artery of the Silk Road, puts interconnection and relationships of trade and investment through the region as its top foreign policy priority." Meanwhile, the Chinese ambassador called for the implementation of big economic and infrastructure projects between Afghanistan and China, and said a railroad would soon be built between the two countries. "During the forthcoming visit, I think that both leaders will have an in-depth discussion on how to further our cooperation in other fields; in the economy, in the security, in the politics as well as in the international issues. One of the major outcomes is that government to government MoU cooperation under the initiative of 'One Belt and One Road'," the Chinese envoy said.

In post withdrawal Afghanistan, one of the countries that can play the most important and supportive role is People's Republic of China. China, being the strongest of the countries in Asia, can lead Afghanistan to reconstruction, development and peace. And, China at the moment seems ready to take up this role.

In fact, Sino-Afghan relations are at a historical point as China could be in the leading role in the post withdrawal Afghanistan. It can definitely play a constructive role in the peace process in Afghanistan and China has already given the indication that it is ready to support Afghanistan in this regard. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also believes that China could be really supportive for Afghanistan in the upcoming challenges. He, on many occasions, has expressed hope that Beijing could play proactive role in Afghan peace process, and also emphasized that lasting peace in Afghanistan would benefit Afghanistan, China and the whole region.

On the other hand, China can also have an immense role to play in the economic stability of Afghanistan and promoting the business and financial self-sufficiency of the country. China is not the largest donor country to Afghanistan, but China's aid is sincere and without any political conditions. In the 1950s and 1960s, although China was not better off at that time, it still built some aid projects such as Parwan Irrigation System and Kandahar Hospital for Afghanistan, which still function well in promoting the livelihood and welfare of local people. In recent years, China has been actively supporting the Afghan peaceful reconstruction. China had provided more than 1.6 billion yuan of grants, trained more than one thousand professionals in all fields through bilateral and multilateral channels, provided over 10 batches of goods and materials, built important projects such as Jumhori Hospital, Teaching Building of Chinese Language Department and Guest House of Kabul University, National Center of Science and Technology Education, and Multi-functional Center in the Presidential Palace for Afghanistan. All of these have played effective role in promoting the development and people's livelihood of Afghanistan, and gained praises from all walks of life of Afghanistan. During President Ashraf Ghani's state visit to China, China committed to provide 2 billion yuan of grants to Afghanistan from up to the end of 2017, and train 3000 professionals in various fields up to 2020. China has clearly shown the willingness that it will not leave Afghanistan's hand at this crucial juncture, wherein it is in dire need of both political stability and economic support. At the same time, it is important to note that the announcement of around USD 3.5 billion by Metallurgic Corporation of China for the development of Aynak Copper mines is another important contribution that can have a lasting impact on the overall economy of Afghanistan.

Apart from economic and political support, China has always continued support for Afghanistan in different other sectors as well. Education and capacity building have been among the most important ones. China, during President Ghani's visit, also promised to provide 500 scholarships to students in the next five years.

In addition, the peace process with Taliban is being supported by China and China has given clear indication that its role would be assistive regarding the process. As put by former ambassador of Afghanistan to China, Sultan Ahmad Bahin, "China's role is important for Afghanistan's peace, reconstruction and other sectors. It is important for Chinese people as their country is one of the biggest economic countries in the world. A more secure region will be crucial for further development of that country."



© 2016
95

TUTAP Route Change

By Sher Ali Nader

In Kabul, public outcry over a recent decision by Afghan government is on the soar. Last week President Ashraf Ghani's cabinet silently approved transmission of a 500 kV electric power line from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan via Salang Pass located in northern part of the country. However, the feasible route as recommended in studies performed by a German consulting company passes through central province of Bamyan.

Significant number of Afghan political leaders, parliamentarians and civil society activists have deemed the decision as discriminatory and have warned the government of a massive protest across the country in the coming few days if it fails to change its mind. The government has been rigid so far despite unsuccessful attempts to defend its decision.

The TUTAP Concept

Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) is a concept by Asian Development Bank (ADB) aimed at promoting trade in electricity between energy-rich Central Asian countries and Afghanistan and Pakistan that face severe electric power deficit throughout the year. Under TUTAP, a 500 kV line will be transmitted from Turkmenistan first to Afghanistan and then to Pakistan.

After crossing the border into Afghanistan the transmission will connect to a sub-station in Pul-e Khumri, the center of northern Baghlan province and will then travel to the capital city of Kabul before being transferred to other parts of the country.

To reach Kabul, the line could pass either through the central province of Bamyan or Salang Pass. Which route should the line go is the current point of dispute between the government and the people.

Bamyan or Salang Pass?

In April 2013, Fichtner a consulting company based in Germany completed a 20-year power sector master plan for Afghanistan in which it highly recommended the Bamyan route. According to the master plan, "The Bamyan route will avoid the narrow space and difficulties along the Salang Pass, will allow connecting further generation by coal fired power plants along the route and will secure power supply of Kabul and south Afghanistan by using a separate route." Meanwhile, Fichtner termed passage of the line through Salang Pass as "very difficult, if not impossible."

There is an existing 220 kV transmission line passing through the Salang Pass. With arrival of winter, every year fear of power cuts due to avalanches in Salang Pass grows high. In 2015, an avalanche in the Pass demolished three electrical pylons that took about one and half month before they were fixed.

Additionally, this route is insecure. In January this year, the Taliban cut off lines carrying electricity from Central Asian countries to Kabul in northern Baghlan province leaving the capital in dark for weeks.

Route Change

Initially, the Bamyan route was chosen and approved by Afghan Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW). Later on, however, the route was changed on requests from Da Afghanistan Breshna Shirkat (DABS), the only company in

the country that manages power supply and distribution. Critics like Assadullah Saadati who is a member of Afghan parliament says DABS representatives went to Germany and pressurized Fichtner to choose any route they want except for Bamyan.

According to DABS representatives, another waiting period of two years is required to change the route back to Bamyan. People on the other hand ask why DABS had to request for a route change in the first place.

Strong Criticism

On April 30 the transmission of 500 kV line via Salang Pass was approved in the Afghan cabinet meeting presided by Ashraf Ghani. The decision triggered anger across the country, especially among the people of Bamyan, faced with such deprivation in addition of systematic genocide for centuries now.

The Presidential Palace, DABS and MEW came under strong and immediate criticism from prominent political leaders and influential figures in the country who termed the decision as terrible and discriminatory. Former head of Afghanistan's intelligence agency or National Directorate of Security (NDS), Rahmatullah Nabil said, "This decision and lack of clarification [about it] will not only extent deprivation of a major fraction of our countrymen that has always been deprived of national wealth and amenities but will also bring our people against one another and cause disagreement among them."

Amrullah Saleh leader of the movement Green Trend who also led NDS from 2004 to 2010 titled his Facebook post as "Central regions are a part of Afghanistan's territory, not a colony of the central government."

He called upon the government to treat central provinces of Bamyan, Ghor and Daikundi as the heart of Afghanistan and urged President Ashraf Ghani to fulfill the promise he had given to the people of these provinces during his election campaign. "Before elections Dr. Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the country, had said he would open the closed arteries of central regions so that the heart of Afghanistan can beat warmly. Please act upon your promise." Fro, Attah Muhammad Noor, the influential political leader in northern Afghanistan, to prominent parliamentarians have called upon the government to change its decision.

The Enlightening Movement

Ahmad Behzad, member of lower house of the parliament who was among the first ones to break the news of TUTAP route change is now leading a recently-formed council called "People's High Council" with other activists to stage a massive protest in Kabul. Using social media, he is also encouraging Afghan diaspora to raise their voice simultaneously and arrange protests wherever they live. "Disgrace apartheid ruling Afghanistan," he said in a recent post on Facebook.

Activists on social media has termed this movement as "The Enlightening Movement," the main purpose of which is to protest not only the recent decision of the government but also create awareness at the global level on the plight of Hazara people ranging from the systematic genocide to political, social and economic suppression in Afghanistan.

Sher Ali Nader is a freelance writer based in San Francisco, California. He has been Op-Ed Contributor for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan 2009-2014. He tweets @S_A_Nader and can be reached via sher.siraj@gmail.com

A Transformational Project for Central and South Asia

By Annette Dixon

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

The opening ceremonies in Dushanbe, Tajikistan starting Wednesday for construction works on the CASA-1000 project mark an important milestone. The project could bring a trade in sustainable electricity between Central and South Asia; address energy shortages in Afghanistan and Pakistan; and will provide financing for new investments and improve winter energy supplies for Central Asian countries. This ambitious project, costing \$1.17 billion, is based on a simple idea.

In the summer months, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have more electricity than they need as their hydropower dams fill to the brim with water from melting mountain snow. Much of this excess water simply overflows and is not used to generate electricity. Once built, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) will generate 1,300 megawatts of electricity from this surplus summer supply and send it through transmission lines to Afghanistan and Pakistan from May to September.

This has benefits for all.

For Afghanistan and Pakistan, CASA-1000 will ease electricity shortages during the peak summer season when demand is highest. A shortage of energy is cited as the main and most binding constraint to business operation, expansion, and job creation. CASA-1000 will also help reduce the countries' dependency on costly, polluting oil-based power generation. Both countries have major gaps between what they generate and what they currently use in electricity. CASA-1000, while not solving their problem completely, will go some way to-

ward making this problem a smaller one.

In addition to reducing energy shortages in Afghanistan, CASA-1000 also has another important benefit for that country. It could help establish Afghanistan as a viable transit country, initially for electricity and perhaps later for other exchanges, as the transmission lines will cross through its territory into Pakistan. This could improve the country's growth and stability prospects by strengthening ties to neighbors and the wider region.

For Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, the project could provide financing for new investments, including for infrastructure and improved services. It will also improve winter energy, because Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan will be able to import electricity through the line in winter from other Central Asian countries and Russia.

CASA-1000 will give a much-needed boost to energy security, improved connectivity and trade across the two regions at a critical time. The project is the first step towards creating the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASA-REM), leveraging Central Asia's significant energy resources to help alleviate South Asia's energy shortages on a mutually beneficial basis.

As a transformational project, CASA-1000 demonstrates the power of regional cooperation through four countries reaching agreement on a project that is a win-win for all involved. The project also helps to revive the Silk Road, the ancient route linking East and West, in a region that used to be separated by hard borders. Like all such ventures, CASA-1000 is not without risk. But the risks are worth taking as the gains for Central and South Asia could be immense.

The writer is Vice President for the South Asia Region of the World Bank.

Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net

افغانستان
The Daily Afghanistan

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.