

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



May 14, 2016

TUTAP Controversy Heightens

Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) power project controversy seems to be getting serious as the plans are underway to start the activities of the project. TUTAP is basically a 500 kV electricity power project, financed by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and is meant to transfer electricity from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan to Afghanistan and ultimately, to Pakistan. From Afghanistan's point of view this project is very much necessary in supporting the electricity infrastructure in the country and provide people with reliable electric energy throughout the year. It can also support Afghanistan in economic terms. This project can also support Afghanistan in realizing the promises of CASA-1000, as without TUTAP Afghanistan cannot serve as transit system for transmitting electricity from Central Asian countries to South Asia because of the incapacity to export bulk of energy.

In an assessment in November 2015, Asian Development Bank (ADB) mentioned, "Afghanistan needs a unified national electricity grid. Different parts of Afghanistan's networks are supplied as passive islands by power fed from Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Because of asynchronous grid operations in these countries, the current network configuration is highly inflexible." TUTAP will thus support in bringing these networks together and allow flexibility in supply and provide efficiency in load dispatch.

The project seems to be of immense importance but, unfortunately, it is facing a controversy because of its route. It has been, somehow, decided that the project would follow the route through Salang but there are many analysts, politicians and people who suggest that it had to pass through central Bamiyan province. The most notable among them is the German engineering consultancy - Fichtner, that suggested in 2013, in an assessment for ADB that Bamiyan route would avoid the narrow space and difficulties along the Salang Pass, would allow connecting further generation by coal fired power plants along the route and would secure power supply of Kabul and south Afghanistan by using a separate route.

In January, this year second Vice President Sarwar Danish had also voiced concerns regarding the implementation of TUTAP through Salang. He insisted that the multi-million dollar project could be jeopardized with devastating Salang risks and ignoring the recommendations of the Fichtner which sketched the master plan of the project. He also highlighted that the implementation of project through Bamiyan could bolster the power generation of coal mine in Dara-e-Suf and Ashpasta areas of Bamiyan, supply of power to Hajigak iron ore and Mes Aynak copper mine, and prevention of power shortage to Kabul and other provinces.

He also wrote a letter to the Ministry of Energy and Water and Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) and called for technical approach to implement the project, considering the needs of the residents of the central provinces for their access to energy who had repeatedly demanded the government to ensure social justice while executing such projects. Recently, Mohammad Mohaqiq, CEO Abdullah Abdullah's second deputy declared that the changing TUTAP's route from Bamiyan meant a clear discrimination and bully against the people of central provinces and he would stop cooperation with National Unity Government (NUG) if his voice and the voices of the people were not heard. The acting provincial governor Ata Mohammad Noor also slammed the government for selecting Salang as the transit route for TUTAP, saying, "Salang is not a priority considering the presence of power lines. The implementation of the project from Bamiyan will not only ensure balance and justice in the implementation of development projects but will also boost unity among the Afghan people." He, thus, urged the government to consider the demands of the residents of central province and allow the project to pass through Bamiyan province. Moreover, thousands of people in Bamiyan, Heart, Daikundi, Ghor, Paktia and Kabul protested against this change of route last week and they demanded that a decision based on justice should be taken and any sort of discrimination against the residents of the central provinces should be discouraged. People promised that they would continue their protests unless their voice were heard. Demonstrations were staged even in London on Thursday, where hundreds of people gathered to condemn government's decision to change the route. These demonstrations were staged while President Ghani reached to London to attend Anti-Corruption Summit.

Additionally, President Ghani's speech was interrupted in the UK-based Royal United Services Institute, when an Afghan protestor interfered during his speech, claiming that he had failed to fulfill his promises he had made to Afghan people. Meanwhile a second protestor raised his voice, saying that Afghan President was discriminating Hazaras, referring to the change in TUTAP route. President's security guards, however, got into a physical fight with the protestor, who was then dragged out. In response to all these protests, President Ghani has blamed the previous government for ambiguities regarding the change in the route. He has also planned to setup a commission to make the final decision. Meanwhile DABS and Ministry of Energy and Water also blame the previous government for changing the route. Karim Khalili, the ex-vice-President, however, says that the previous government had a clear idea that the project would pass through Bamiyan as it had the Fichtner report. The ambiguities and back-door decisions have led to misunderstandings regarding the change in route. Government, in this regard, needs to remove all these ambiguities and it requires a solid reason to ignore the Fichtner report, which is based on technical suggestions not political inclinations.

The London Anti-Corruption Summit

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

President Ashraf Ghani is in London to attend a key international summit on corruption. Afghanistan is described as one of the most corrupt nations in the world with hundreds of millions of dollars being embezzled or given as bribes to corrupt officials each year. In its annual report on corruption in the world, the International Transparency put Afghanistan along Somalia and North Korea as the top three corrupt nations of the world. Shortly ahead of the London Summit, in a meeting with Queen Elizabeth, British Prime Minister David Cameron described Afghanistan and Nigeria as "fantastically corrupt", sparking reactions from officials of the two countries. An Afghan official has said the characterization was unfair. Afghan officials have asserted that the Afghan government is determined to fight corruption, and Ashraf Ghani would share his views with world leaders and talk about Afghanistan's achievements and its continued commitments to fight corruption.

The London anti-corruption summit aims to promote global efforts against corruption and establish a shared vision on fighting the phenomenon. With the summit aimed at pushing countries to do more to curb corruption, countries with high levels of corruption like Afghanistan and some African nations are particularly under the spotlight. While the Afghan government is eyeing to use the opportunity of the world stage to persuade the international community that the Afghan government is committed to fight corruption, Western leaders present in the summit want to hear from the Afghan President about the progresses made in curbing corruption in Afghanistan. The international community supporting stabilization and development of Afghanistan is eager to see if the anti-corruption efforts in the country are sustainable and going to the right direction.

Countries like Afghanistan, that are affected by endemic corruption have much to lose while anti-corruption campaigns in these countries are undermined by instabilities and weak economies as well as governments. The anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan in the last over a decade have largely been a misguided campaign with the Afghan government and the international community failing to establish a sustainable and result-oriented campaign. During the past fifteen years of the collective efforts, Afghanistan and international supporters failed to establish shared policies and coordinate efforts and resources designated for the campaign. On the other hand, the war consumed a large part of the focus and resources and, as a result, Afghanistan and the international community lost focus on the campaign.

In the upcoming decade, success in the fight against corruption is vitally important for Afghanistan. It is probably going to continue dealing with a resurgent Taliban insurgency and other militants for many years to come and possibly for decades, and having sufficient funding either from its own revenues or from the international donations will be crucial for winning the war against the Taliban and other militant groups. However, the prospect of the country having the required funding is never assured. Afghanistan is far from being able to quickly

improve economy to generate sufficient cashes for funding the war as well as ordinary and development expenses, taking into account that the insurgency is hampering the development efforts aimed at improving the country's economy.

On the other hand, with Afghanistan remaining as one of the top corrupt countries in the world, the international community supporting Afghanistan is growing even more fatigue with the unsuccessful efforts. The flow of international aid to Afghanistan has already declined and is going to further shrink if NATO and the US go ahead with the planned drawdown of their troops that are currently providing training and advising Afghan security forces. With the Middle East and other areas in turmoil, a continued support from the international community to the stabilization and development of Afghanistan is never certain and things can quickly change. In such chase, having corruption problem will be a recipe for disaster of failure to stabilize the country and defeat the insurgency.

Therefore for Afghanistan, managing to curtain corruption or fail in the efforts is a matter of success or failure in the efforts to salvage the future of the country. Successfully fighting corruption would be one of the most important tools in the fight against the Taliban insurgency. But the problem is certainly a major threat for the future efforts of the to stabilize the country. The international community has made it clear that Afghanistan needs to achieve concrete results in fighting corruption if it is going to continue receiving international aid to fund its security forces and the administration. The national unity government has done well in engaging with its Western backers, and has largely managed to persuade them that the new government is committed to fight corruption. But it has failed to have progresses in curtailing the level of corruption in the country despite the initiatives it has taken since coming to power two years ago.

Afghanistan is eyeing on the upcoming international conferences to have renewed commitment of its Western supporters in funding Afghan security forces as well as the country's routine and development expenses. Fighting corruption is set a major prerequisite for continued support of the international community.

However, the international community supporting Afghanistan is unhappy with the results of the anti-corruption efforts, and this will inevitably have impacts for the two major upcoming international conferences on Afghanistan. President Ghani may have nice talks in the conference, but the fact is only that would not help the lagging anti-corruption campaign.

Ghani needs to be frank about the challenges and commitment of the government. He needs to explain the genuine plans the Afghan government has to ask for assistance from the international community to implement them. The London Summit on corruption is an opportunity for the government of Afghanistan to persuade the international community to remain committed to support the anti-corruption campaign in Afghanistan. The government of Afghanistan needs to use such opportunities and reenergize the fight against corruption.

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Harnessing the Genomics Revolution

By Gerardo Jimenez-Sanchez

Just 13 years after the successful completion of the Human Genome Project, the power of genomics applications to spur innovation is already becoming apparent. Indeed, though the genomics revolution is just getting underway, it is becoming a transformative agent in the global economy - one that promises to bring far-reaching social and environmental benefits.

In the United States alone, the \$3.8 billion in public funds invested in the Human Genome Project has already generated close to \$1 trillion in economic returns and more than 300,000 jobs. According to the OECD, genomics will become a central component of many economic sectors, including health care, the environment, agriculture, animal health, biotechnology, alternative energy, forensics, justice, and security. With the pace of innovation continuing to accelerate, this prediction will likely be fulfilled even sooner than anticipated.

The area where genomics-driven innovations have attracted the most attention is health. Rapid progress toward truly "personalized medicine" is occurring, with patients' DNA profiles being translated into more individualized, predictive, and preventive medical care.

Already, studies to identify genes associated with common diseases - including some that represent significant health, economic, and social burdens, such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity - are beginning to enable doctors to use patient DNA information to inform clinical care. And researchers are identifying genetic variations that influence the effects of drugs, allowing safer and more effective administration of medication to manage pain and treat some cancers, as well as cardiovascular and psychiatric diseases.

Taking these developments a step further, the Precision Medicine Initiative, launched in the US last year, is pursuing innovative trials of targeted drugs for adult and pediatric cancers, introducing customized combination therapies, and honing its understanding of drug resistance. In the longer term, the project aims to create a research cohort of more than a million volunteers whose shared genetic data, biological samples, and lifestyle information will form the foundation for precision medicine in a large number of human diseases.

But health care is far from the only area influenced by the genomics-driven revolution. There have been game-changing developments in other fields as well, many with proven potential to help address global challenges, such as ensuring food security

and safeguarding the environment in the face of a rapidly growing global population, expected to reach 9.6 billion in 35 years.

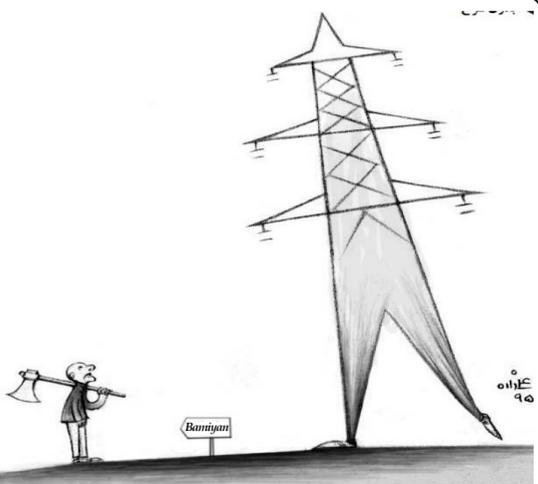
Selection of high-value traits using genomics is giving farmers, and the food industry in general, the tools to produce more and better foods. Rice crops in Southeast Asia, for example, can now be flood-resistant. Beef, dairy, and swine herds produce higher output. The burgeoning fishery and aquaculture sector is benefiting from species with better yields and greater resistance to disease and stress.

Moreover, by providing detailed information on biodiversity and the interactions within ecosystems, genomics is driving the development of innovative environmental-protection strategies. Forests are a prime example. By broadening our understanding of commercially valuable traits, such as insect resistance, wood quality, growth rates, and adaptation to climate change, genomics has helped to improve the sustainability of tree breeding and forest management. Canadian and Chinese researchers are also using genomic analysis of the microbial communities living in hydrocarbon deposits to develop new bioprocesses that will make oil and gas extraction greener, by enhancing resource recovery, reducing water and energy use, and minimizing greenhouse-gas emissions.

The promise of genomics is seemingly limitless. But if that promise is to be fulfilled, major challenges must be overcome. In health care, in particular, we need to continue generating solid evidence of the value of moving personalized medicine into routine practice.

Furthermore, rigorous economic analyses are needed to guide policies on health-care coverage and reimbursement. Above all, important questions surrounding patient privacy, technology access, reporting of incidental findings, discrimination, and counseling must be answered, so that thoughtful and forward-looking public policies can be devised. To this end, mechanisms to ensure broad public discussion and participation must be strengthened. Even at this early stage, it is clear that genomics is set to transform science and technology and sustain a wave of far-reaching innovation. Now is the time for countries and regions to embrace genomics research and technologies, and to start translating them into effective solutions to major global, regional, and local challenges. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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