

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

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## Chabahar Agreement and Afghan-Indian Relations

President Ashraf Ghani, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani signed a three-way transit agreement on Iran's southern port of Chabahar on Monday May 23, 2016. India will invest about \$500 million for developing the project and it is going to benefit from it to a large extent. It will provide India an access to the land-locked countries of central Asia. But, it will benefit the region, at the same time.

Indian Prime Minister Modi said in a statement, "We want to link to the world, but connectivity among ourselves is also a priority. The bilateral agreement to develop the Chabahar port and related infrastructure, and availability of about \$500m from India for this purpose, is an important milestone. This major effort would boost economic growth in the region."

This port will be economically beneficial for Iran as well. After the bans have been lifted, Iran is seeking to strengthen and speed up economic ties and activities. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said in a press conference, "With our joint investments in Chabahar, we can connect India through a reliable route to Afghanistan and countries in Central Asia... The agreement today is not only an economic document. It's also a political and a regional one."

From Afghanistan's perspective, this will allow trade and robust business activities through its land and will also provide better access to Indian trade opportunities. Afghanistan is expected to have sea-land access through the port by the end of this year as the work on the port already began by a joint venture of Kandla Port Trust (KPT) and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) last year. Access to Afghanistan's Garland Highway can be created from Chabahar port using the existing Iranian road network and the Zaranj-Delaram road, constructed by India in 2009. But most importantly it will pave the way for further economic cooperation with India and Iran. As, President Ghani said in a statement, "Our will starts from Chabahar today, but its end will be an all-out comprehensive development and economic-cultural cooperation."

India seeks to expand its economic presence in Afghanistan in the post withdrawal era. In particular, it wants to improve transport connectivity and economic collaboration with countries in Central and South Asia. More such projects are likely to come up, which includes setting up Iron ore mines, a 6 MTPA steel plant (by SAIL-Steel Authority of India Limited), an 800 MW power plant, Hydro-electric power projects, transmission lines, roads etc.

Afghanistan's Garland Highway, setting up road access to four major cities in Afghanistan - Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. From Chabahar, the existing Iranian road network can link up to Zaranj in Afghanistan, about 883 kms from the port. The Zaranj-Delaram road constructed by India in 2009 can give access to Afghanistan's Garland Highway, setting up road access to four major cities in Afghanistan - Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. Undoubtedly, India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Afghanistan. India's extensive developmental assistance program, which equals around \$2 billion, is an indicator of its abiding commitment to peace, tranquility and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical juncture of security and governance transition. This makes India one of the leading donor nations to Afghanistan, and by far the largest among the regional countries.

India seems to believe that development of Afghanistan requires reliable and lasting investment in Afghanistan that can help it exploit its natural resource properly. Therefore, India stands at the forefront of the promotion of investment in Afghanistan and a consortium of public and private Indian companies has been selected to make one of the largest investments in the country's mining sector, in the Hajigak iron ore reserves.

India also realizes the fact that there can be stability in Afghanistan only if all the major actors and countries have a stake in its stability, development and growth. Realizing this India has been increasing efforts to attract regional and trans-regional investment into Afghanistan that provides a reliable alternative to the dominant narrative of extremism and offers job opportunities to its population, by initiating events like the Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan in June 2012. Recognizing that the region holds the key to peace in Afghanistan, India has an important role in confidence building measures in the region in accordance to the Istanbul Process. It also helped initiate a dialogue on Afghanistan through different platforms like the Afghanistan-India-US trilateral and the Afghanistan-India-Iran trilateral platforms that seek to bring together international partners with disparate worldviews to follow the common goal of securing peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. India also expressed its assistance to international cooperation on Afghanistan at the UN and at various international conferences that are focused on the future of Afghanistan, including the seminal Tokyo Developmental Conference in July 2012.

In the post withdrawal Afghanistan, as there are security, financial and political challenges, Afghanistan would require developing strong economic ties with the regional countries and as India plays a dominant role in the region, it can support Afghanistan in achieving such an objective. Moreover, in the times of challenges and troubles Afghan people and government would require true support and assistance; therefore, India's support for Afghanistan will of immense importance and the people of Afghanistan also realize this fact and they wish that India should keep its assistance continue until it is able to stand on its own.



## "Promoting Visit" to Deepen Friendship Between China and Afghanistan

By Yao Jing

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

At the invitation of Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, paid an official visit to China from May 15 to May 18. This visit was very important as the two countries' diplomatic relationship has entered the second cycle of 60 years. If President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's visit to China in 2014 was a "direction-determining visit", which determines the Afghan National Unity Government's relation with China in the new era, CEO Dr. Abdullah's visit would be a "promoting visit", which further pushes forward the Strategic and Cooperative Partnership between China and Afghanistan.

I had the honor to accompany CEO Dr. Abdullah throughout the visit and had some prominent feelings as follows:

First, it was a visit to promote the bilateral relations. This visit significantly pushed forward the bilateral relations jointly established by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Afghan President Ghani in the new era. CEO Dr. Abdullah was received with high standard of hospitality, indicating that China attached great importance to the bilateral relations. CEO Dr. Abdullah held separate meetings and talks respectively with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Vice President Li Yuanchao, attended the welcome ceremony and banquet hosted by Premier Li Keqiang. Leaders of both countries had in-depth exchange of views on issues of common interest and reached broad consensus. The two sides jointly issued the Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan which further defined the future direction, connotation and motivation of China-Afghanistan relations, and would be of great significance to consolidate the strategic mutual trust, as well as deepen the mutual beneficial cooperation in various fields. Second, it was a visit to deepen the mutual trust. The Chinese side expressed its firm support for the inclusive peace and reconciliation process which is "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" and its willingness to deepen the cooperation with Afghanistan in the fields of counter-terrorism, counter narcotics etc. The Afghan side expressed its support for China's position on issues related to Taiwan, the South China Sea and other issues concerning China's core interest and major concerns, and reaffirmed to continue its firm support to China in combating "the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement". The Chinese side valued and welcomed Afghanistan's desire to obtain membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization and to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Third, it was a visit to improve connectivity. The Chinese side expressed its willingness to help Afghanistan promote its connectivity with neighboring

countries and to connect China's "One Belt and One Road" initiative with Afghan national strategy for transformation and development. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Afghan Foreign Minister Rabhani signed the MOU on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to specify the objectives, principles and concrete content of cooperation. During the visit, both sides exchanged views about China-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran Railway project and agreed to stay in communication in this regard. Both sides agreed to strengthen information and communication connectivity, including launching "Afghan Satellite 2" cooperation project. Fourth, it was a visit to enhance cooperation. China vowed its continuous support to the Afghan peace and reconstruction, and would like to help the Afghan Government to formulate its national infrastructure plan, and set priority areas of bilateral cooperation. The two sides signed six cooperation agreements. China would continue to use its grants to construct the low-cost affordable housing in Afghanistan, implement the Kabul University main building and auditorium project and other projects. Both sides agreed to speed up their work to complete the access protocol for Afghan saffron, and access assessment for Afghan pine nuts, pomegranate and other featured products. Fifth, it was a visit to encourage exchange. CEO Dr. Abdullah's visit to Xinjiang, which adjoins Afghanistan, placed a great importance to strengthening friendship and cooperation between the two countries, as it's the first Afghan leader's visit to Xinjiang in the past 10 years. China would continue to encourage and support Afghan students to study in China, to support Afghanistan to promote Chinese language teaching, to consider building more Confucius Institute in other cities, and to train 30-50 Afghan agricultural management personnel and technicians in the next three years. The visit has achieved fruitful results by the joint efforts of the two sides. Many people from different walks of life in both countries have contributed generously to facilitate the development of China-Afghanistan relations. The two sides will earnestly implement the outcome of this visit in the next stage, continue to push China-Afghanistan relations to a new high for the benefit of both countries and their people.



Yao Jing, is the current Ambassador of People's Republic of China to Afghanistan.

## The Aftermaths of Mullah Mansoor's Killing

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Mullah Mansoor's death came as profoundly unexpected for all parties involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. The new Taliban leader was doing well in consolidating his power within the Taliban as he proved skillful in uniting the group's senior leadership around him and relentless in suppressing the irreconcilable splinter and rival groups. Facing fierce opposition from many of senior members of the Taliban, Mullah Mansoor quickly managed to impose his leadership over the group after he was named as the successor of the Taliban founder, Mullah Omar. He further consolidated his power and the Taliban insurgency by organizing aggressive military operations against the government of Afghanistan and refusing to join the peace initiative backed by the four-way group comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States.

However, his death is hailed by many in Afghanistan and the United States as a major blow to the Taliban insurgency that was gaining further momentum under leadership of Mansoor and his notoriously-famed Sirajuddin Haqqani. It is seen as a major milestone for the war and peace efforts in Afghanistan. The United States and the government of Afghanistan expressed hopes that his demise would help the peace process and persuade the Taliban leadership to come to table of peace negotiations. The United States and the Afghan government have mentioned Mansoor's killing as a rare opportunity for the peace efforts in Afghanistan, urging the Taliban to come to the table of negotiations with the Afghan government. Both Afghanistan and the US have described Mansoor as a major hurdle against the peace process, and expressed hopes for a potential breakthrough in the talks with the post-Mansoor Taliban. However, it seems the optimism is largely based on the euphoria of the operation's success and the sense that the killing is a major military as well as political achievement for the administrations in Kabul and Washington. It is obviously a major blow to the Taliban, but the argument that it would help peace seems to be quite premature. Irritated by Taliban's refusal to join the four-way peace plan backed by Pakistan, China and the US, the Obama administration and the government of Afghanistan is trying to attribute the failure of the peace initiative to Mansoor's hard line, and that his demise is going to help renew the peace talks with the Taliban. This is while there is no assured signs that the Taliban's senior leadership will be more willing to talks with the Afghan government after managing to find a new leader to replace Mullah Mansoor.

It is a rightful argument that Mansoor's approach to the peace efforts largely shifted after he assumed the Taliban's leadership. Mansoor is said to have taken harder stance towards peace talks with the government of Afghanistan after he took over the leadership of the Taliban. American officials claim he was tempted to revive the group's relations with Al-Qaeda and other militants who are considered as international terrorist groups. Afghan and US officials also say he was the main figure behind Taliban's refusal to join the four-nation backed peace initiative that was set to resume talks between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. All evidences corroborates the claims that Mansoor's approach to peace talks with the government of Afghanistan substantially shifted compared to the time he was dubbed as a pro-peace figure when he was

serving as the right-hand to Mullah Omar, and later when he effectively led the Taliban while hiding the death of Mullah Omar.

The shift in Mansoor's approach to peace talks with the Afghan government was one of the factors that helped him consolidate his power within the Taliban. By taking harder stance on the peace process Mansoor managed to largely mend the internal rifts among the Taliban over peace talks with the Afghan government and appease the broader spectrum of Taliban members opposing talks with the government in Kabul. And by intensifying the Taliban insurgency across Afghanistan, Mansoor also proved him as an indispensable leader for the group with the ability to effectively lead the movement and gain victories on the ground. With no doubt a combination of these with his outreach to the disgruntled members of the group helped him to unify senior Taliban members around him and deprive the splinter group of a major power base in the group. Therefore, the dominant opposition to peace talks with the Taliban tells everything behind Mansoor's refusal to start a window for negotiations with the Afghan government. Any successor to Mansoor for Taliban leadership is not expected to do differently and risk his influence and power within the Taliban senior leadership who are believed to be overwhelmingly opposed to talks with the Afghan government and the United States.

Therefore, it is less likely that the killing of the Taliban leader will help a change of stance in Taliban's approach to the peace process. It is even possible that the Taliban get even more hostile to the peace efforts if the group successfully manages to resolve leadership succession. Things could go differently if the killing of Mansoor triggers a leadership crisis within the Taliban. If failing to successfully resolve the leadership succession, the Taliban would be weakened, and out of weakness and chaos, some splinter and disgruntled parts or members of the Taliban may come forward for opening talks with the government of Afghanistan. It should also be considered that the Taliban will try to seek revenge rather than changing approach and entering peace talks with the government of Afghanistan. The Taliban is going to blame both Afghanistan and Pakistan responsible for the death of their leader.

The killing will further extend the mistrusts between Taliban and Pakistan who has played a facilitating role in the Afghan peace efforts. Given this, if the Taliban successfully manages a leadership transition, the group will likely take a harder stance to the peace initiative backed by Pakistan and the United States.

Without any doubt, Mullah Mansoor's killing is hitting the Taliban hard. Mansoor had proved exceptional in leading the Taliban's insurgency campaign across Afghanistan. It would be hard for the Taliban to agree on the right replacement for Mansoor. Sirajuddin Haqqani is dubbed as a mastermind behind Taliban's more sophisticated attacks, and he is said to be one of the possible contenders for assuming Taliban leadership. But his appointment to the position will bring further rifts among the Taliban as he has been the leader of the Haqqani network which has been operating independently from the Taliban. The death of Mullah Mansoor is exposing the Taliban to a potential internal power struggle that could benefit the war and peace efforts in the country.

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