Changing dynamics in Central & South Asia: The role of Uzbekistan

By Yuri M Yarmolinsky

The report of the US National Intelligence Council, Global Trends 2040, contrasts most strongly with the consolidated diverse peacekeeping initiatives in Afghanistan, broad efforts in this field by regional players (for example, Uzbekistan), and signs of a certain détente in Kashmir along the disputed India-Pakistan border. Both Afghanistan and Kashmir have long been a seething cauldron of systemic contradictions and conflicts.

The document notes that during the next five years, India and Pakistan may stumble into a large-scale war neither side wants, especially following a terrorist attack that the Indian government judges to be significant. The report puts a special focus on the fact that a full-scale war could inflict damage that would have both economic and political consequences for years. The report underlines that US actions in Afghanistan during the next year will have significant consequences across the region, particularly in Pakistan and India. This would be especially true if a security vacuum emerges in Afghanistan that results in a civil war between the Taliban and its Afghan opponents, expanding maneuverability for regional terrorist networks, or criminals and refugees flowing out of the country. It predicts that the events in Afghanistan will fuel political tensions and conflict in western Pakistan and sharpen the India-Pakistan rivalry.

Uzbekistan: A future regional player

Considering these forecasts and practical realities, attention should be drawn to the diplomatic activity of Uzbekistan in South and Central Asia. President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has announced a fundamentally new aspect in his foreign policy with a focus in the southern direction. In particular, the development of cooperation with South Asia and the promotion of peace in Afghanistan have been identified as priorities.

Tashkent's vision of the settlement of the Afghan conflict and its impact on regional processes, including throughout the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) territory, was outlined in February by Eldor Aripov, Director of the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In his opinion, the prospects for stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably linked with the achievement of peace in Afghanistan.

For many centuries, Afghanistan has been an important link in the regional trade, cultural, scientific, and intellectual exchange, playing the role of a connecting bridge for Central and South Asia. Harnessing Afghanistan's transit and infrastructure potential will provide the Central Asian countries with the shortest access to the seaports of Pakistan, which would benefit not only Uzbekistan, but also all the Central Asian republics, South Asian states, and the monarchies of the Middle East. The strengthening of interconnectedness will facilitate the formation of favorable internal and external prerequisites for the development of interregional trade, cultural and scientific exchanges, as well as for maintaining peace and stability throughout the vast areas of the two regions.

In turn, Vladimir Norov, SCO Secretary-General, notes that the speedy settlement of conflict in Afghanistan is a key factor in establishing stability in the SCO

See P7

Bangladesh to Lock Down as COVID-19 Cases Surge

Bangladesh starts its most severe lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic Thursday with people allowed to leave their homes only in emergencies and soldiers set to patrol the streets to enforce it, as the nation faces a deadly resurgence of COVID-19 infections.

The government announced the new measures as the coronavirus surged in recent days, particularly in border areas. Health officials say the national COVID-19 positivity rate is now over 20%. Sunday saw a record number of deaths, with 119, followed by a record number of new cases — 8,364 — set Monday.

Along with home confinement, the restrictions include the closure of public transport networks, sending thousands rushing to ferry and bus stations over the last two days to make it home before Thursday.

The Guardian newspaper reports Cabinet secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told reporters troops would be deployed after the lockdown takes effect. He said, "If anyone ignores their orders, legal action will be [taken against] them."

Bangladesh closed its borders when the pandemic hit last year. But many people travelled to and from India illegally anyway, bringing with them new infections. And while India's situation has stabilized, in Bangladesh, it has escalated.

Health officials are concerned the Eid al-adha Muslim holiday at the end of July will only exacerbate the situation. Bangladesh Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research official Dr. ASM Alamgir said that if the Delta variant of coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is not already in Bangladesh, it will be by then.

He said that while new infections are currently concentrated around border areas, during Eid millions of people go from the capital, Dhaka, where infections are also on the rise, to village areas.

Officials expect Thursday's lockdown to last at least a week.

VOA

Pakistan's daily coronavirus caseload goes over 1,000 for first time in a week

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's daily coronavirus case load went back over the 1,000 cases in a day mark after the country reported 1,037 new cases Thursday morning.

The daily case count has been under 1,000 since a week now. The country last reported 1,052 cases in a day on June 25.

Another 40 people died of coronavirus in Pakistan in the last 24 hours, pushing the national death tally since the pandemic started to 22,321.

Latest data issued by the National Command and Operation Centre Thursday morning shows that after 46,145 tests were conducted on June 30, 1,037 people tested positive for coronavirus.

Pakistan's positivity rate is currently 2.2%. A day earlier, Pakistan's positivity rate ticked back up to 2.3% after the country reported a rate under 2% before that.

The total active COVID-19 cases in Pakistan are currently 31,767.

According to a province-wise breakdown, the total cases reported in Sindh so far are 337,674, in Punjab 346,301, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 138,068, in Islamabad Capital Territory 82,706, in Balochistan 27,178, in Gilgit-Baltistan 6,138 and in Azad Jammu and Kashmir 20,343.

At least 904,320 people have recovered so far across Pakistan, making it a significant count.

According to NCOC's figures, the total number of cases has reached 958,408.

Uzbekistan greenhouse cucumber export increased by 76%

In January-April of 2021, Uzbekistan exported 4.2 thousand tons of cucumbers in the amount of $5.1 million, which is $2.2 more compared to the same period of last year. In other words, the overall increase in cucumber export comprised 76% in relation to the results of 2020, reported the State Committee on Statistics.

Almost all the volume of cucumbers (99.6%) was delivered to the marketers of three post-soviet countries: Kazakhstan (47.6%), Kyrgyzstan (35.7%), and Russia (16.3%).

According to the information by the analytics of Eastfruit, the highest volume of cucumber export was noted in 2018. Even though it is yet early to speculate about the forecasts for 2021, the data of the first four months allow make assumption that in 2021 cucumber export would not be lower or would retain on the level of last year.

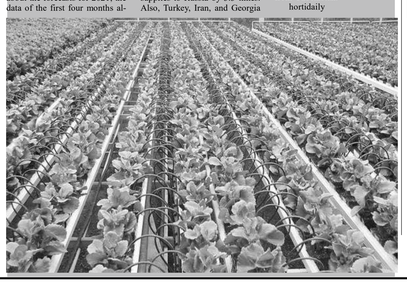
However, one of the export territories, namely Russia, is rapidly developing greenhouse production, including cucumbers. Moreover, within the first four months of the current year, Russia exported almost as many cucumber as it has imported, having dramatically increased the export and reduced the import.

Nonetheless, Uzbekistan continues to supply the Russian market with cucumbers, as the Asian part of the Russian Federation still faces a temporary deficit of the produce.

In 2021, Uzbekistan increased supplies to Russia by 3.3 times. Also, Turkey, Iran, and Georgia have increased the volumes. However, the leaders of the last year, China and Belarus, have decreased greenhouse vegetable export to Russia within the mentioned period in comparison with the last year.

Greenhouse vegetable production is one of the most rapidly growing industries in Russia. Within the past 5 years, greenhouse acreage has increased by 1.5 times and the production volume has enhanced by 80%, having reached in 2020 the record-setting 1.37 million tons. Moreover, the greenhouses constructed in Russia are energy efficient and more advanced, which allows replacing import, including the produce from Uzbekistan.

hortidaily



German developer aims to build 45GW green hydrogen complex in Kazakhstan

German renewable energy developer Svevind Energy has signed a memorandum of understanding with Kazakhstan's national development agency to develop a massive green hydrogen complex.

The agreement with Kazakh Invest envisages the building of wind and solar farms with a combined generating capacity that is equivalent to the entire installed capacity of Egypt.

The projects will be located in the steppe areas in the west and centre of the country. The farms will be complemented by 30GW of electrolysers to produce about 3 million tonnes of green hydrogen a year. This would then be exported to the Eurasian markets or used locally to fuel plants making ammonia, steel and aluminium.

Svevind presented its plans to the Kazakh government in talks held in the capital city of Nur-Sultan in May. The financing, engineering and procurement phases are expected to take three to five years. Construction and commissioning phases are predicted to take another five years.

Wolfgang Kropp, Svevind's chief executive and majority owner, said "We are aiming to combine the outstanding natural resources in Kazakhstan with our long experience and passion in project development to supply Kazakhstan and Eurasia with green, sustainable energy and products, 'powered by nature'.

"The green hydrogen facilities will make Kazakhstan a global leader in renewable energy and hydrogen at ultra-low production costs. We trust that for green hydrogen, Kazakhstan is the place to be."

Svevind is based in Weißenbrunn and Dresden in Germany, Piteå in northern Sweden and Almaty in Kazakhstan. It has been developing large-scale onshore wind power projects in Scandinavia since 1998.

It is best known for the Markbygden 1101 cluster of wind farms in northern Sweden, the largest wind farm in Europe. When complete in 2022, it is expected to have a capacity of around 4GW.

Earlier this year Svevind passed the 1GW mark for turbines in operation, and has another 1.5GW under construction. It raised around €2.8bn in equity and long-term debt to finance those projects.

Once complete, Markbygden 1101 will provide around 8% of Sweden's electricity consumption.