Afghanistan reacts over Pakistan's continued support to Taliban

Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in reaction to recent remarks of Pakistan foreign affairs minister Shah Mehmoud Qureishi has said the country has full influence on the Taliban group.

A spokesperson to Afghanistan ministry of foreign affairs says the Taliban group is under full influence of the Pakistan government; for example, Afghanistan negotiating team returned from Qatar to home country to consult with Afghans, while the Taliban negotiating team traveled to Pakistan months ago.

In reaction to Shah Mehmoud Qureishi's recent remarks saying that Taliban leaders are not in Pakistan, the MoFA spokesperson said that Pakistan somehow have complete influence on the Taliban group.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan believes that Pakistan honestly cooperation and the country's commitment can help accelerate Afghanistan peace process.

We do believe that Pakistan has full influence on Taliban and can convince the group to talk with Afghanistan government," said Gran Hewad, spokesperson of Afghanistan foreign affairs ministry.

Previously, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in his interview with Der Spiegel had said that US had a small part in Afghanistan peace, while the issue and peace and war was on the hand of Pakistan.

With invitation of the Taliban negotiating team to Islamabad, Pakistan wanted to show it does not any hand in equipping and funding terrorism.

The country succeeded to get some international legitimation for the Taliban group. Some neighboring and regional countries particularly Pakistan have been somehow monitoring the continued crisis in Afghanistan for the past four decades, while they do not have any productive program for peace and stability in the country.

But, now it seems that Pakistan is seeking to choose another way for continued crisis and dispute in Afghanistan. Giving legitimacy to the Taliban group and on other hand, strengthening terrorist groups can help expedite this destructive process.

It is worth mentioning that more than 200,000 terrorist and fighters from various countries of the world have been trained in terrorist training centers in Pakistan for the past 40 years as most leaders of the terrorist groups are benefiting from safe homes provided by the country's ISI. Currently, Pakistan is hosting all leaders of the Taliban group, while the country has committed to do more in counter terrorism effort.

In consideration to role and relations of Pakistan with terrorist groups such as Taliban and Haqqani network, Pakistan has particular position in providing safe havens for terrorist groups particularly the Taliban. It is time now for Pakistan, accused of supporting terrorist groups, to show its honesty in fighting on terror.

Pakistan should measure its options with full precision because if Afghanistan enters to another war, the country should wait its negative economic impacts. It is worth mentioning that Pakistan was included in list of countries supporting terrorist groups from 2012 - 2015, but it was removed from the list since.

Lailuma Noori

Afghanistan faces shortage of oxygen as third COVID surge worsens

KABUL: Afghanistan is racing to ramp up supplies of oxygen as a deadly third surge of Covid-19 worsens, a senior health official told The Associated Press in an interview Saturday.

The government is installing oxygen supply plants in 10 provinces where up to 65% of those tested in some areas are Covid positive, health ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastgir Nazari said.

By WHO recommendations, anything higher than 5% shows officials aren't testing widely enough, allowing the virus to spread unchecked. Afghanistan carries out barely 4,000 tests a day and often much less.

COVID in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's 24-hour infection count has also continued its upward climb from 1,500 at the end of May when the health ministry was already calling the surge "a crisis," to more than 2,300 this week. Since the pandemic outbreak, Afghanistan is reporting 101,906 positive cases and 4,122 deaths. But those figures are likely a massive undercount, registering only deaths in hospitals — not the far greater numbers who die at home.

Oxygen Shortage

Meanwhile, Afghanistan received 900 oxygen cylinders from Iran on Saturday, part of 3,800 cylinders Tehran promised to deliver to Kabul last week. The shipment was delayed by Iran's presidential elections, said Nazari.

Afghanistan has even run out of empty cylinders, receiving a delivery of 1,000 last week from Uzbekistan.

Meanwhile hospitals are rationing their oxygen supplies. Afghans desperate for oxygen are banging on the doors of the few oxygen suppliers in the Afghan capital, begging for their empty cylinders to be filled for COVID infected loved ones at home.

Abdul Wasi, whose wife has been sick for nearly 10 days, has been waiting four days for one 45-liter cylinder to be filled at the Najib Siddiqi oxygen plant in east Kabul. Scores of mostly men were banging on the 10-foot steel gate of the oxygen plant. Some rolled their empty oxygen cylinders up against the gate, while others waved small slips of paper carrying the number of their cylinder inside the plant, waiting to be filled.

Wasi said there were no hospital beds for his wife, whose oxygen level hovers around 70-80%. They are rationing her, he said giving her small amounts of oxygen when it drops to around 45 -50%.

"How can I do anything else? I have been waiting four days for my cylinder to be filled," he said. The oxygen plant refills cylinders for 400 Afghanis (roughly $5), while in the market it costs 4,000 Afghanis (roughly $50).

Country's poor suffering the most

For the country's poor — over half of Afghanistan 36 million people according to World Bank figures — the situation has become desperate.

Wasi said on Friday as he waited outside the oxygen plant that a patient on a stretcher was carried to the door while the family begged for oxygen. The patient died.

"Right there," he said pointing to the gate. "I saw them carrying the patient. They were crying and begging and then he died."

Barat Ali had arrived at the plant at 6 a.m. Saturday. It was his third day waiting for his cylinder to be filled.

"The poor people in this country have nothing. I have been standing in the sun for eight hours," he said clutching his small piece of paper that contained his cylinder number. The government "has eaten all the (international) donations."

Concerning situation

Necephor Mghendi, who is the Afghanistan delegation head for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told the AP in an interview in Kabul that the groups are working to get an oxygen generation plant into the country.

The Afghan Red Crescent runs a 50-bed hospital devoted to Covid patients and uses roughly 250 cylinders a day, but in recent days it has been receiving barely half that many.

The needs are critical he said, offering as an example one patient currently at the Red Crescent hospital who needs one 45-litre cylinder every 15 minutes to stay alive, he said.

"The situation is very concerning," he said.

Inside the Najib Siddiqi oxygen plant dozens of cylinders were being filled, but owner Najib Siddiqi said he can't keep up. He supplies hospitals but has cut output to them by half, with the other half going to the crowds banging on his gates. He even fills smaller cylinders for free, but he has only the capacity to fill 450-500 cylinders a day.

"It's not enough. They are outside like this all day," he said.

Sakhi Ahmad Payman, chairman of the Afghanistan Chamber of Industries and Mines, who was inside the plant having made a tour of the oxygen plants in the city, said all nine facilities in Kabul were overwhelmed.

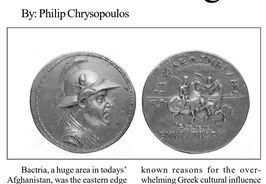
Countrywide he said Afghanistan has 30 oxygen producing plants, and all are unable to keep up with demand.

Payman blasted the government.

"They knew we were in the middle of a crisis and didn't do anything until it was too late," he said. **Monitoring Desk**

Bactria: The ancient Greek state in Afghanistan

By: Philip Chrysopoulos



Bactria, a huge area in todays' Afghanistan, was the eastern edge of the ancient Greek empire, established by Alexander the Great.

Alexander and his army began a massive military campaign in 334 B.C. which resulted in Macedonians establishing many Greek cities across a wide swath of Southeast Asia. His rule, and that of his successors, would eventually reach all the way to the Indian subcontinent.

Alexander and his army conquered great tracts of land between Greece and India. But in the ancient state of Bactria, the Greek presence became much more prominent than in areas that were far closer to Greece.

The Kingdom of Bactria was located north of the Hindu Kush Mountain range and south of the Amu Darya River, on the plateau where Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are today. After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided up among the generals in his army. Bactria became a part of the Seleucid Empire, named after its founder, General Seleucus.

Seleucus I and his son Antiochus I went on to establish a great many Greek towns. The Greek presence was so overpowering that the Greek language remained prominent in the region for some time.

Bactria the eastern edge of the Greek empire

However, one of the lesser-known reasons for the overwhelming Greek cultural influence in the region was the mass deportations of Greeks to Bactria. During the reign of Darius I, every single one of the inhabitants of the Greek city of Barca, in Cyrenaica, were deported to Bactria for refusing to surrender suspected assassins to the authorities.

The Persian King Xerxes also sent prisoners to the area. The "Branchidae" were the descendants of Greek priests who had once lived near Didyma and who had surrendered the temple to him. The Greek historian Herodotus also records a Persian commander threatening to enslave daughters of the revolting Ionians and send them to Bactria.

Diodotus I, the satrap, or ruler, of Bactria declared independence from the Seleucid kings in the year 245 B.C., conquering Sogdia and becoming the founder of the great Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. Diodotus and his successors resisted continued attacks from the Seleucids, particularly from Antiochus III the Great, who was ultimately defeated by the Romans in 190 BC.

The Greco-Bactrians became very powerful militarily and succeeded in expanding their territory as far as present-day India.

The Greeks who had instigated the Bactrian revolt had become extremely wealthy, partially due to the great fertility of their country. Their great wealth enabled them to become masters not only of Bactria, but also of India.

Greek language for administrative purposes

The Greco-Bactrians used the Greek language for administrative purposes, and the local languages were also influenced by Hellenism, as suggested by their adoption of the Greek alphabet and some Greek words.

Bactrian King Euthydemus I and his son Demetrius I crossed the Hindu Kush mountains and began their conquest of the Indus valley. Within a short time they were so powerful that a Greek empire seemed to be on the rise in the East.

However, corruption and internal feuds tore the nascent empire apart. When Demetrius advanced far east of the Indus River, one of his generals, Eucratides, pronounced himself king of Bactria.

Usurpers suddenly arose in every province. All of them desired to be kings, and they fought bitterly against each other.

Many of them did become kings, as evidenced by the many gold coins found centuries later in Afghanistan. But they were kings only within their own provinces. The interneceine wars between them had taken a great and irreversible toll, destroying much of what had made their societies advanced and diminishing the Hellenic element.

After Demetrius and Eucratides, the kings abandoned the Attic standard of coinage and introduced a native one, to attract support from non-Greeks.

In the Indus Valley, the Indo-Greek king Menander I converted to Buddhism. The last known Indo-Greek ruler, King Strato II, ruled in the Punjab region until around 55 B.C., according to some sources. Others place the end of Strato II's reign as late as 10 A.D.

"Without doubt, we were poor and the Coronavirus pandemic made us further impoverished"

By: Nangialai Ibrahimi

This is Tawakh village, Unaba district of Panjshir province. Tawakh and its neighboring communities present a beautiful view which gives further beauty to the landscape over here. We are standing in front of Malang's door made of typical wood. Asked if he was ok, we were told that Malang had lower limb disability as he had lost his both legs due to a landmine in the past. Since then, Malang has been experiencing the greatest economic difficulties, which the lockdown placed due to Covid-19 pandemic, further built upon these hardships.

We wanted to meet Malang closely. After we knocked on Malang's door, his little son opened the door. We entered the house and saw Malang standing with support of crutches under his armpits.

He looked happy with smile on his face. After he saw us, he suggested that we ought to go inside his house. When we entered his house, we saw his children with different age groups taking the relief packages, distributed to them under Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program, inside the yard with such a great pleasure. The children indeed didn't take any notice of us because they were busy packing the food items. It was only Malang who welcomed us. We told Malang that his children were very happy. By showing agreement with our comments, he said, "Why shouldn't they be? They are as happy as if they are celebrating Eid today".

While smiling, we told Malang what he meant by Eid. He gave a loud laugh and said.

"Oh yes, we received food items under Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program today".

I have become more interested in asking further details from Malang. While giving support to his children in carrying of relief packages to their house, Malang revealed: "Without doubt, we were poor and the Coronavirus pandemic made us further impoverished.

It was only Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program which satisfied our survival needs by providing us with basic food needs such as flour, rice, cooking oil, red beans and hand wash soap. Thanks to Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program – it has first identified and listed down the vulnerable households in both rural and urban communities with the help of Community Development Councils (CDCs) and now they are distributing relief packages to them accordingly. So, this is the major reason behind the pleasure of my children." It is worth noting that around 27,116 thousand deserving households in 121 communities of 7 districts in Panjshir province have received relief packages under Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program so far. As of June 20, 2021, more than 809 thousand households in 6,165 communities of 34 provinces of Afghanistan have received relief packages totaling more than 3.29 billion Afghanis under Dastarkhwan-e-Meli Program.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in negative economic impacts on the lives of people, especially the poor & daily wage-earners. The Government of Afghanistan has initiated a relief response program – called Dastarkhwan-e Meli – that would be implemented in cities and villages.

Dastakhwan-e-Meli program is planned to be implemented in two phases.

The Kabul Times