

USURPATION OF GOVERNMENT - OWNED LANDS CONTINUES

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[Analysis no.1](#)

[Analysis no.2](#)

Borders Reopening and its Effect on Afghan Exports



The coronavirus pandemic has affected many countries globally. Along with other areas, Exports and imports have been particularly affected. Since Afghanistan largely exports to Pakistan, exports were negatively affected when Pakistan closed borders due to covid-19 outbreak from March, 2020 to 22nd June, 2020. Pakistan has closed borders with Afghanistan on several occasions before the pandemic, which has severely damaged trades and businesses. Here, the center for strategic and regional studies (CSRS) discusses challenges that are facing Afghan exports to Pakistan, how to overcome them, and how the borders reopening affect exports.

A Quick Review of the Exports of Afghanistan

Afghanistan's exports contains 20% of the country's Gross National Income (GNI). Its lowest aggregate has been 69.1 million USD and its highest was 875.24 million USD. In 2019, the total exports of Afghanistan reached 863.83 million USD, due to which, Afghanistan held 141 rank in the list of exporting countries.

Afghanistan mainly exports grapes, other fruits and dried fruits, vegetables, rugs, coal, gemstones, and some other goods to several countries including the followings:

Pakistan (42.9%), India (40.6%), China (3.2%), Turkey (2.5%), Iran (2.3%), United Arab Emirates (1.8%), Iraq (1.5%), Tajikistan (0.8%), Saudi Arabia (0.7%), Germany (0.6%), and Qazakistan (0.5%).

Overall, Afghanistan has 98.1% exports to countries within Asia continent, 1.4% to Europe, 0.4% to North America, 0.1% to Australia, and 0.02% exports to Africa.

Afghan exports are too low compared to imports and reaches only 5% of the imports.

Afghanistan's Exports to Pakistan

As Afghanistan is a landlocked country, it has been facing various problems to export. In addition, politics and security-related uncertainties have also negatively affected exports of Afghanistan. For instance, when diplomatic relations are not in a good form or if a terrorist attack occurs in Pakistan, trade between both countries, especially Afghanistan's exports, are severely affected. Consequently, Afghanistan's traders faces millions dollars losses as Pakistan usually blames Afghanistan for attacks, and therefore, closes border.

In order to mutually benefit from trade, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed APTTA (Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement) in 1965 which was revised in 2010. According to the agreement, Afghan merchants are allowed to export goods to India through Pakistan and vice versa. In return, Pakistani trucks will be permitted to access any market of Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has always one-sidedly misused the agreement and has taken advantage of Afghanistan's enclosure by land. As a result, Afghanistan's exports were negatively affected.

Pakistan is a nearby and economical market for Afghanistan and import most of goods from the country. Similarly, Pakistan is also a bordering market for Afghanistan's exports. However, due to distrust and uncertainties between both countries, trade opportunities have been challenged many times. Consequently, both countries have been financially affected in trade sector.

In 2014, Pakistan closed Ghulam Khan Port during its military operations in Waziristan. In addition to this, Pakistan has closed Turkham and Chaman passageways with Afghanistan every time when a terrorist attack has occurred or political relations have debilitated.

In March, 2020, Pakistan has closed all borders with Afghanistan due to the coronavirus pandemic. The outbreak was called "global epidemic" and caused prices increase in several provinces including Kabul. This was due to inability of Afghanistan to import from Pakistan and export to other countries during the pandemic.

Later, Pakistan reopened the Turkham and Chaman gates for three days upon request of Afghan officials and allowed imports for the duration. On 20th June, 2020, Ayesha Farooqi, spokeswoman of the ministry of foreign affairs of Pakistan declared that Turkham, Chaman passageways

and Ghulam Khan port will reopen for 6 six days of every week and passengers of both countries will be allowed to cross the border the next day. Seemingly, reopening of borders is not only in favor of Afghanistan, but a huge advantage for Pakistan and its government.

Afghanistan's Exports and Some Challenges

As Afghanistan mainly exports vegetables, fresh and dried fruits, they have become a great source of income for Afghan traders and farmers. Although the Afghan government has promised to overcome the current obstacles, but traders and farmers are still waiting for action.

It has happened many times when farmers are unwilling to represent their products to the market since the expense of accessing the markets is higher than its income. For instance, farmers in Farah province always claim that they sell 1 kilogram of watermelon for 1 Afghani. And so, farmers are facing many economic problem.

Pakistan has not only increased tariff on Afghan exports, but checks every truck of fresh fruits. As a result, fruits and vegetable rot during delays for checkups. Also, goods exported to Pakistan are reimported to Afghanistan as Pakistan's exports. Absence of a particular strategy for trade with Pakistan is among the causes of the challenges that are facing exports.

Conclusion

The coronavirus crisis has severely affect global trade and economy. Hence, it is necessary to encourage Pakistan to mutually implement the APTTA agreement so that trade between both countries is not affected by political and contemporary issues. Afghanistan's trade with Pakistan has been negatively affect by US force pullout. The complete pullout of the US forces may further push exports to abysses and Afghanistan's

economy may collapse. This is because political dissension may rise and foreign exchange will fall and insecurities may intensify after the pullout.

Therefore, the Afghan government should thoroughly review the current policies of exports and imports. After his second election as the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani ordered the ministry of foreign affairs to encourage embassies to attract demand for Afghan products in foreign markets. Although his instructions in this regard is admirable, but more effective steps need to be taken in order to increase exports of Afghanistan

In addition, the Afghan government should resolve the current problems of Visa, tax, and border opening and closure for Afghan merchants. Also, the government should encourage those products that have higher income and can help to reduce imports, so that the country can satisfy its needs from within the country.

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USURPATION of GOVERNMENT - OWNED LANDS CONTINUES



According to Pajhwak News Agency, the mayor of Kabul has sanctioned certain rights to several businessmen and parliament members which empowers land usurpation of government lands and green areas. It is being said that Dawood Sultanzoi has endorsed illegitimate orders after his appointment as the mayor of Kabul. Pajhwak's evidence shows that he has decreed an exceptional command which allows a private company to establish a building on a land that belongs to the ministry of education in zone 12. In addition, he has extraordinarily endorsed construction on 12 Jerib¹ (5.9 acre) government-owned land for some members of the parliament in zone 8.

¹ 1 jerib = 0.49 acre

A Great Challenge

Land usurpation has been a great challenge for Afghanistan throughout a few decades. During the last 18 years, around 50,000 jerib (24710.5) land has been appropriated in Kabul province. The government has strived to recapture the lands several times, but the attempts were unsuccessful either due to the government's inability to confront the influential warlords (who are mostly armed), or the government kept silent aiming for reconciliation.

On 16 January 2021, 8 AM newspaper published a report which claims that around 2 million jerib (988421.5 acres) land has been stolen in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the senior advisory of construction and aesthetics for the president has declared to Hamid Karzai, former president of Afghanistan that around 4.5 million jeribs (2223948.4 acres) agricultural, rural and urban lands of the government have been seized. Among those who have usurped the lands include vice presidents, deputy ministers, high ranking officials, and members of the parliament, jihadi leaders, local influential figures and even ordinary people. The report was extensive and comprehensive enough that officials of the advisory were even threatened by some powerful figures and they were carrying out their duties under a special protection of security forces.

Usurpers have not only seized state-owned properties but have appropriated lands of civilians. Hindu citizens who lived in Afghanistan for years before the fall of Dr. Najibullah administration, and the charge of Mujahidin to cities. Back then, they were owners of lands, houses, and numerous properties. After the attack of mujahidin, enduring wars and establishment of Taliban's administration, Hindus were forced to temporarily leave Afghanistan. After their return, however they witnessed that they have lost their lands and houses, and have no power to regain their land ownerships. Overall, 90% of Ahl-e-Hanud's lands have been stolen and they are unable to get their lands back.

An establishment called "home of freedom" published an article under the name of "a dark chapter of land usurpation" in February 2020, for which, the researchers have interviewed 70 government officials. According to the article, most of the lands were usurped during the 14-year administration of Hamid Karzai, a former president of Afghanistan. In addition to Kabul where most of the lands were usurped, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kapisa, Baghlan, Takhar, Nimroz, Khost, Logar and Ghazni are the provinces, where land usurpation is comparatively high. Also, Nooristan, Paktika, Panjshir, Daikundi and Ghor were provinces where lesser land was usurped as these provinces have fewer areas to be stolen. According to the officials of the home of

freedom, the government has sufficient information about land usurpation, but no steps were taken to confront usurpers.

Who Have Usurped the Lands?

In July, 2019 the ministry of Urban Development and land announced that 1500000 jerib (741316 acres) land has been appropriated all over the country. According to the ministry, more than 18 thousand individuals are involved in these usurpations. Among them, 15 thousand have been introduced to justice and prosecution units. In addition, findings of the ministry show that most of the land usurpations are undertaken by local vigorous figures. The spokesman of the ministry of urban development and land has told the Voice of America that more than 500 thousand jerib (247 acres) land has been freed from the hands of usurpers.

According to the statistics of the ministry of economy, 138996 jerib² (68693.3192 acres) land has been officially registered as stolen. In addition, the statistics shows that 1241 jerib (613.3 acres) has been usurped in Heart, 20500 jerib (10131.3 acres) is usurped in Nangarhar by 13 individuals, 1714 jerib (847 acres) land is usurped by 15 individuals in Kunduz, 11426 jerib (5646.8 acres) is appropriated by 11 individuals in Kabul, and 5345 jerib (2641.5 acres) land is usurped by two individuals in Parwan province. However, since the issue

² 1 Jerib = 0.49 acre

contentious, the government is also not willing to name the usurpers. Lands have been stolen for years but the actions taken by the government were not gainful.

To prevent land usurpation, the unity government commenced government-owned lands registration. Later in May 2020, it was declared that more than 6 million jerib (2965264.5 acres) government land has been appropriated. The acting minister of urban development and land stated that a key mission of the process is to identify and register state-owned lands, prevent land usurpations, distribute lands to eligible individuals and implementation of projecting aiming for public utility.

Members of the anti-corruption commission admit that the size of usurped lands is far wider than the statistics since deserts and expansion of cities like Nangarhar, Kabul, Mazar-e-Shareef, Herat and Kandahar are also to be counted.

Efforts to Reclaim the Appropriated Lands

Thus far, only 400 thousand jerib (197684.3 acres) land has been reclaimed by the government. Meanwhile, combat with land usurpers is expensed for political reconciliation.

Although efforts have been made for land reclamation during Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani's administration, efforts were not successful

enough to eliminate the roots of the problem. Land usurpation has become a great obstacle for the government, as most of the usurpers have made fake documents for the lands. Most of the stolen lands have become residential areas and lands have been sold to ordinary people. Hence, it is difficult for the government to displace ordinary people, who have bought the lands, out of their homes. Moreover, most of the usurpers live outside Afghanistan and those whose lands have been stolen are no longer striving to reclaim their lands.

Considering the current circumstances, it does not seem to be possible to implement President Ghani's promises of 15 February 2018 planning to implement a project against land usurpation. Then, he forewarned that he would establish a special court for usurpers and if they do put an end to their actions, their names will be uncovered to the media. However, there were no remarkable actions taken in this regard during the unity government. To be precise, there are no laws and regulations sanctioned, according to which, land usurpers can be dealt with. In addition, prosecution and justice establishment are powerless against usurpers. As a result, the government was unable to take action against land appropriations.

Resolutions

In order to prevent land usurpation, a firm decision and continuous implementation of the process is required. Although a law to prevent

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