

AFGHANISTAN AND THREATS TO CUT OFF THE IMPORTED ELECTRIC POWER

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On 26th July, 2020, the Da Afghanistan Breshna sherkat (DABS) startlingly reported that effective 7:30 AM, Tajikistan will reduce the imported electricity supply from 350 MW to 40 MW. As a result, Kabul and some other provinces were severely affected by the cut.

Why investment on electricity production seems little despite numerous foreign aids during the last 2 decades? When will Afghanistan become a self-sustained country by producing its own electricity? For how long will the imported electricity be able to last and satisfy the needs? Here, we discuss these issues.

Imported Electricity; How Long Will it Last?

Afghanistan pays 25 million USD monthly or 300 million USD yearly to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran in exchange for their power transmission to Afghanistan. A few days ago, Tajikistan unexpectedly reduced their electric power supply from 350 MW to 40 MW due to their lack of water supply in the country. After Tajikistan's power cut, the DABS announced that they will import additional 400 MW electricity from Uzbekistan. Similarly, Uzbekistan a few months ago threatened to cut off the power supply unless their expenses are paid in advance. Apparently, to satisfy their own needs and desires, electricity exporting countries can hit the off switch anytime. Whenever they want to, they can deprive 30% of

the population of Afghanistan from electricity that currently has access to electric power. Afghanistan has spent millions of dollars to pay the expenses of importing electricity. If those expenses were invested on constructing dams and electricity production projects, more than 30% of the population would have had access to internally produced electricity.

Considering the decrease in foreign aids and poor economic condition of the country, Afghanistan will soon be deprived from electricity due to its inability to pay for the imported electricity.

During the last 2 decades, government officials and DABS have made only empty promises and have failed to construct dams that will be utilized to produce electric power.

The Fundamental Solution is to Build Hydroelectricity Dams

Although Afghanistan has the ability to produce 318 GW electricity and only requires 2500 MW to satisfy needs, but it still imports 80% of the electricity from foreign countries. Among the provinces, only Kabul requires 750 MW electric power, while it currently has access to only 450 MW electricity. Lack of access to electricity has not only created obstacles for local investments, but prevents foreign investments in the country. Among the 75% population of Afghanistan that lives in rural areas and produces 67% of gross national product, only 9% has access to electricity.

The government has failed to construct dams and reservoirs locally. For instance, construction of Machalgho dam, which was planned to inaugurate in 2011 and should have been accomplished within three years' period according to the plan, has still been delayed due to corruption and negligence. Later, constructional works of the dam were reinitiated in 2017, for which, a Russian company was contracted to construct the dam. However, the works were unsuccessful for the second time as well. For the third time, the operations unit of the president's office has been appointed to construct the dam within 16 months. The unit has also promised to accomplish its constructional works within 16 months if security conditions are suitable. With an organized plan, construction of the dam could have been accomplished years ago. But despite spending 1.1 billion AFGs, the dam

has still not been constructed and only 7% of its constructional works have been completed.

In addition to Machalgho dam, many other dams and reservoirs have been inaugurated only to show off. However, due to corruption and negligence, their construction has not been accomplished.

If the Afghan government is truly willing to profoundly resolve the electricity issue, it should firstly eliminate corruption that currently exist in utilization of imported electricity. This is because there are many governmental and non-governmental organizations that have not paid their electricity bills since years. As a result, the DABS, in order to focus on local production of electricity, neglects the payments of imported electric power. Subsequently, the Afghan government gets forced to pay the amount from the national budget that has not been collected from organizations due to corruption. Consequently, such doings affect the economic condition of the country, postpone construction of dams and reservoirs, and increase reliability on imported electric power.

On the other hand, the international community should not only financially support electricity production within the country, but should comprehensively monitor its progress and success. In addition, the master plan of electricity that was developed in 2004 should be reviewed, as in spite of numerous foreign funds, it has not been able to efficiently produce electricity within the country. It is a fact that Afghanistan is facing security problems when it comes to construction of dams, But the Afghan government could even have had remarkable achievements by investing on renewable energy. However, because of poor policies and strategies, such innovative steps were not efficiently taken.

In this regard, construction of dams and reservoirs should be reconsidered. Although government officials present security threats as an excuse, but latest researches show that security problems rarely occur while constructing dams. For instance, researches show that there was no security threat to construct Machalgho dam during the first four years of construction. Yet, the construction was unsuccessful due to poor supervision and widespread corruption.

What Should Be Done?

If noticed, the government has spent millions on capacity building of Afghan experts. However, foreign experts have had greater role instead of Afghan experts and specialist when it comes to planning and designing for electric power production. According to Mohsin Amin, masters graduate of Oregon State University and expert of energy sector has said that international monetary organizations and The World Bank never agreed to construct Hydroelectricity dams in Afghanistan.

If the government truly intends to boost electricity production within the country and decrease reliability on imported electric power, it should not only construct dams and reservoirs, but establish a security unit that will aim to protect the infrastructure and eliminate corruption. Anti-government bodies should avoid seeking monetary gains in projects that are planned to construct electricity related infrastructure. They should comprehensively support dams' construction projects. Such actions can expose corrupt individuals who do not want to see a self-reliable Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the government should avoid inauguration of too many dams' construction projects. As witnessed previously, inauguration of dams' construction was to show off and campaign for elections or a position. As a result, many projects that were commenced years ago are still incomplete and those dams that were harmed due to war and insecurity have still not been reconstructed. Hence, considering the security and economic conditions, it would be beneficial if only limited number projects are commenced and rapidly accomplished. Also, the public should be motivated to consider the dams as their national treasure and protect them from harms. On the other hand, those who have access to electricity should be encouraged to pay the bills on time, so that expenses of imported electricity can be paid on time.

The government should also step up in order to eliminate corruption and put an end to the embarrassment that is being elicited globally to Afghanistan due to corruption. To boost internal electricity production, Ghazanfar Group has signed an agreement with the World Bank to invest 89 million USD to produce electric

power for Mazar-e-Shareef city. Hence, the government should back the private sector and eliminate security challenges for their projects.

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CORRUPTION AGGRAVATES THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE COUNTRY



On 22nd July, 2020, surveillance cameras of the central bank of Afghanistan were shockingly shut down for four hours. After 10 days, the central bank reacted to the matter and said that a limited number of CCTV cameras were shut down due to technical issues. On 27th July, 2020, via a newsletter, the central bank denied the allegations of CCTV surveillance stoppage for four hours and claimed that a limited number of cameras were shut down for a few hours. The newsletter emphasized that the central bank has already investigated the matter and the results have shown that no assets and properties were damaged or lost during the period.

Although the central bank claims that no assets of the bank were harmed during the period of CCTV surveillance stoppage, but many social media users criticize the shut down and considers it a case of corruption. While corruption exists all over the world at different extents, it is widely spread in Afghanistan's administrative system.

Unfulfilled Promises

During his electoral campaign, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani made 19 promises to combat corruption upon success. He used to emphasize on accountability and transparency. In this regard, he considered the absence of an assets recording and justice systems as the key causes of corruption. Hence, back then, he claimed to bring the following changes after winning the elections:

- Reforming the ministry of justice, attorney general's office, courts and police departments
- Registering lands, properties and assets in a legal approach.
- Evaluating governmental contracts
- Prevention of trafficking and illegal exports
- Controlling ports and passageways through local authorities
- Prevention of selling and buying of governmental positions.

After the establishment of the unity government, President Ghani once again emphasized to implement his anti-corruption plan in London's conference in 2014 and declared his 20 promises in an article.

In 2017, it was announced that bribe is given more than its annual budget in Afghanistan. During that year, the numbers were 1 billion higher compared to 2014. However, the country rose by 5 positions in the list of the Transparency international. According to the organization, Afghanistan has attained 15 points in the list and stands at 176th position among 169 countries. While the country attained only 11 points and stood at 3rd place in the list of most corrupted countries in 2015. In addition, Afghanistan attained 16 points in 2018 and stood

close to Sudan and Ghana. The transparency International has lately published a list of 180 countries and has reported that Afghanistan has attained 15 points out 100 in 2017 and 16 points later in 2018. However, the country withholds 16 marks in 2019, showing no change in the points table. The statistics of the organization show that Afghanistan stands among the top 10 most corrupted countries in the world.

Failure of Governmental Anti-Corruption Structures

There are many anti-corruption organizations such as high anti-corruption authority, high anti-corruption commission, justice authorities, internal audit departments, high authority of internal auditing and some others who operate to fight against corruption. Yet, corruption is still widely increasing in presence of such organizations. Despite their efforts, corruption still challenges the system by causing distrust of people regarding the operations of the government, and triggering negligence, fraud and unethical deeds in the society. Corruption not only prevents investments, but spreads like a cancer in society and sometimes becomes incurable.

Srirak Plipat, Director for the Asia Pacific at Transparency International has earlier said “the justice system and other government bodies require extensive reformation in order to eliminate corruption. The current efforts to combat corruption are inefficient since no known corrupt individual has faced justice in the country”. In addition, Jocelyn Mason, secretary of the UNDP has expressed that lack of strategy and, absence of a comprehensive plan against corruption are the main causes of corruption in Afghanistan.

According to reports of some international organizations, Ashraf Ghani got elected as the president when Afghanistan was at the peak of corruption. So in

order to attract foreign aids, Ashraf Ghani needed to decisively fight against corruption. Therefore, the unity government took noticeable steps to combat corruption. However, due to various challenges and obstacles, the government's anti-corruption efforts were unsuccessful, due to which, Afghanistan is still considered as one of the most corrupted countries in the world. In addition to the efforts of the government against corruption, it can be clinched that there are abundant shortcomings in the structure of the government which itself breeds corruption.

Nowadays, Government offices rarely carry out operations without bribe. In various organizations, ministries, municipalities, security establishments, traffic police, and even universities, bribe and personal relations are favored over talent and education. In order to be recruited for a position, bribe is publicly demanded from applicants. Also, instead of qualification, recruitments are carried out based on political ties and personal relations. In order to attain a position in an administrative wing of an organization, using personal ties and bribe has become a pretty ordinary requirement. Therefore, to combat corruption, a deep knowledge of corruption and corrupt officials is vital. This is because misusing a legal, economic or a political position for unjust recruitment can easily violate the right of a deserving individual and can give privileges to an unworthy individual. Such things clearly go against the constitution of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Although there were plenty of challenges to combat corruption during the first period of Ashraf Ghani's administration, but the unity government was able to reduce corruption to some extent. However, since his win in the second term of presidential elections, he has neither spoken of his anti-corruption plans nor have

actually stepped up to combat corruption. On the other hand, various cases of corruption and bribery are occasionally reported. Seemingly, instead of combating corruption, Ashraf Ghani and his team is engrossed in preserving their administration and rerouting the peace process towards their demands. In addition, his hostility with Abdullah Abdullah and his team can also be a cause of the lack of attention towards anti-corruption measures.

In a word, the high ranking officials of the government should understand that corruption, economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, insecurity and war have taken the people to the brinks of agony and destruction. If the government is unable to end the war and bring peace and security to the people of Afghanistan, it should at least reduce corruption and the fight the economic crisis that is caused by the coronavirus.

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