Hoping for Peace Talks?
By Hujjatullah Zia

Holding out against peace negotiation, militants continue unabated in Afghanistan which undermines the burgeoning democratic ownership, US General Joseph F Dunford said on Sunday. “Peace has remained a dream that never comes true for Afghan nation. There is a sense of fear and mistrust in the air and the glimpse of hope for peace talks has disappeared. The Taliban fighters are wounded by the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was appointed as the head of the Taliban in Balochistan area on May 21, and therefore, intensity their attacks. The negative perception of the Afghan people towards the Taliban in Afgha- han had reached deadlock several times within the last decade. The prominent promiss in this stance are Mullah Omar’s death, which was revealed on late July 2013, and his successor Mullah Mumr. Omar’s death prompted the Taliban outfit to stage a coup and to elect the US-approved Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as the leader with stronger determination than before. To put it succinctly, the sudden demise of Mullah Omar was a shock treatment to change the molder of fact was an irreplaceable loss for the Taliban which triggered a rift between his fighters. Subsequently, a number of the Taliban militants pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic Emirate of State of Afghanistan and the Isaf (ISAF) to fill the vacuum of their spiritual leader Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi – the ISIL’s Caliph. On the other hand, Manoor claimed to fulfill Omar’s vacuum. However, his succession led to splint group and widened the gap between the Taliban elements. Spins also emerged between Mansoor and those who challenged his appointment, his brother Mullah Wazid Naseer and in the West; Mullah Ahmad Manan, and also Mullah Mansour Dadullah.

Loyal to Akhtar Mullah killed Mansour Mullah Dadullah, his brother Mullah Omar; his fighters, for not pledging alliance to Omar’s successor, in Kabul – which envisaged Mullah Omar’s family members to lead the Taliban. This was the view of the Omar’s son should lead the Taliban. Finally, the most important reason for the rift between Mansour and the rational faction under Mullah Omar was his family.

After all, Omar’s successor started heavy attacks against Af- ghanistan to consolidate his position. Although his death was a blow to the Taliban, it did not carry much weight among the Taliban. Contrary to public belief, the Taliban announced Mansoor’s death as a tactical ploy, a move for winning time without disappearing. Following all the interminable offs and ons, the Taliban leadership is in a crisis role of wolves. It is not based not only between the negotiations but also among the members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), mainly after Mansour’s death. In late May, a fifth round of four-nation talks aimed at laying the ground for a negotiated end to the Afghan war in Islamabab, but hopes were dashed after the Taliban insurgents to the table quickly.

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T he Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Tashkent gives Afghani ans some confidence in its fight against terrorists, as the re gional council consider the security situation in Afghanistan as one of the most important issues. They have also shown their consent that they will support Afghanistan in the war against terrorists.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said in a statement on Friday June 24, 2016 that SCO can play a constructive role in helping Afghanistan to quest to re-store peace and stability in the country. Tadjikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon also laid strong emphasis on the establishment of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and said that stability in Afghanistan was in the interests of the entire region and the world.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev also pledged his country’s support to Afghanistan and said that they would understand the regional problem to be solved.

Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov invited Chuan to visit Tashkent in the near future so that the countries broaden ties in the Aqsha railways less and establish strategic agreement.

There is no doubt that the SCO can support Afghanistan in many ways particularly in facing security challenges. Currently, there has been an upsurge in insecurity in different parts of the country and there are fears that Afghan security forces would face a Herculean task to guarantee security. The enemy forces have multiplied since the rise of Daesh in some of the provinces. The previous peaceful parts of the country have turned into battle fields and there does not seem to be any clear indications of re- turn of peace or peace talks with Taliban. Afghanistan at this stage remains support from the regional countries but particularly from China.

Chinese support to Afghanistan has come in different forms. There are various assistance and support projects sponsored by China that are going on in Afghanistan. They are related to different sectors; like economic, infra-structure development and security and education. However, China would have to continue their support even enhance that as Afghanistan is trying to stand on its own. The most important sector would be security. Since most of the international forces have withdrawn from Afghanistan and Afghan security forces are shouldering the entire responsibility of their own, they would require tremendous support from China.

One of the most important outcomes of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is peace talks between the Taliban and Afghanistan. Whether there will be a platform provided by the SCO to make formal peace talks in Afghanistan. It can be involved in the regional countries in this respect. If so, then collectively a comprehensive support strategy to deal with the threats of terrorism in Afghanistan. Apart from assisting Afghanistan, they can also support the Afghan security forces to fight the Afghan Taliban fight against the Taliban.

One of the most important recent developments in the peace talks is the leadership change in the Taliban. Whether that happens on the platform of Shanghai Cooperation Group (SCO) or SCO, a serious negotiation between the two parties is crucial. China can play its role in further stimulating the process and eliminate the obstacles of various nature.

China is playing a significant role in the process of formal peace talks in Afghanistan. It can be involved in the regional countries in this respect. If so, then collectively a comprehensive support strategy to deal with the threats of terrorism in Afghanistan. Apart from assisting Afghanistan, they can also support the Afghan security forces to fight the Afghan Taliban fight against the Taliban.

Conservation Challenges for Endangered Asian (Indian) Lions in South Asia
By Saikat Kumar Basu

Gujarat, Western India is rich in biodiversity and one of the historic habitats of the majestic Asiatic lions. It is important to mention that the population of endangered Asiat-ic lions have increased considerably in the Gir Sanctuary over decades due to excellent conservation efforts by the Gujarat State Forest Department. However, the carrying capacity of the sanctuary (in terms of lion population) is slowly being reduced by the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the Afghan Taliban leader in the past decade; and there is immediate need of relocating the excess lion population to suitable habitats. The lion population is not finding enough prey animals in the sanctuary and are often crossing the boundaries due to hunger. The precious ani- mal species are becoming vulnerable and there is no appropriate steps taken by the state government. Several national and international agencies have warmed the Gujarat state govern- ment about the serious consequences of a future contiguous disease that could decimate the local lion populations or any natural disaster that could wipe out the lion population due to massive forest fires or destructive flood. The state government is greatly interested to retain the lion population in the Gir sanctuary for tourism purposes and as such is reluctant to identify suitable lion habitats in other adjoining states for relocating excess lions. The state government has been repeatedly guarding its lion population in a questionable manner that in the past an Indo-Iranian agreement of exchanging couple pairs of Asian (Iranian) and Indian lions for exchanging for breeding pairs of Asian (Indian) lions for Iran were scrapped. The Gujarat govern- ment was of the view that there is no need to keep the lion population in the Gir sanctuary for tourism purposes and as such is reluctant to identify suitable lion habitats in other adjoining states for relocating excess lions. The state government has been repeatedly guarding its lion population in a questionable manner that in the past an Indo-Iranian agreement of exchanging couple pairs of Asian (Iranian) and Indian lions for exchanging for breeding pairs of Asian (Indian) lions for Iran were scrapped. The Gujarat govern- ment was of the view that there is no need to keep the lion population in the Gir sanctuary for tourism purposes and as such is reluctant to identify suitable lion habitats in other adjoining states for relocating excess lions. 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