South Asia: Economic Integration: Challenges and Opportunities

A review of economic history will show that Asia has been an open region fully involved in the world economic system as far back as pre-modern times. When China and Japan, during the 16th and 18th centuries, respectively, ostensibly closed their borders to outsiders and external trade, evidence shows that the closure only applied to what were called the "forbidden goods." Even then, Asia had an instrumental role in the global division of labor and its conduct in the world economy was open and orthodox. Recent global trends have been characterized by an increasing trend to trade on preferential basis in a bilateral or regional grouping rather than on an MFN basis. Realizing the importance of intra-regional trade, the South Asian region has also embarked upon various processes of regional economic integration. This is evident from the increased economic engagements, bilaterally and regionally, both with countries in the region and outside. However, the South Asian regional integration process is fraught with difficulties.

Main challenges

The first is the political instability and war. The second is how to build regional blocs that go beyond trade to include industrial policy, a shared agricultural policy, macroeconomic coordination, and technology sharing. The third is how to ensure that building complementarity among economies does not reproduce the old, unequal division of labor between stronger and weaker economies. The fourth is how to promote a development process that does not reproduce inequalities of the regional and national levels in the name of capital accumulation. The fifth is how to promote a development process that is sustainable, that is, one that is built on ecologically benign technologies and is not based on ever-rising material consumption per capita. The sixth challenge would be how to ensure that via redistribution is necessary to bring people out of poverty. The sixth is how to avoid a technocentric approach to promote instable and institutionalized decision-making in all areas of the economy. The seventh, related to the previous point, is how to move away from a statist process and institutionalize civil society participation in all key areas of economic decision making. Civil society must not only provide a check to both the state and the market, but it must also be the leading force in the nature of development that confronts the structural economic weaknesses within the region. In order to augment the level and scope of South Asia's economic cooperation, all these need to be approached in an objective manner. Ultimately, such an exercise would be impossible if the narrow definitions and policy responses to address these different levels of difficulties.

Main Opportunities

On the other hand the South Asian regional integration process presents many opportunities. The first is the strengthened position for negotiating with other trading blocs. The second is gradual liberalization through a slow increase in levels of competition that alter domestic sectors to adjust and build some comparative advantage before facing the challenge. The third is ease in addressing difficult issues within a small group that allows domestic sectors to adjust and build some comparative advantage before facing the challenge. The fourth is strengthened position for negotiating with other trading blocs. Thus, a "phased" and "synchronous" approach will be promising. The fifth is how to promote a development process that is sustainable, that is, one that is built on ecologically benign technologies and is not based on ever-rising material consumption per capita. The sixth challenge would be how to ensure that via redistribution is necessary to bring people out of poverty. The sixth is how to avoid a technocentric approach to promote instable and institutionalized decision-making in all areas of the economy. The seventh, related to the previous point, is how to move away from a statist process and institutionalize civil society participation in all key areas of economic decision making. Civil society must not only provide a check to both the state and the market, but it must also be the leading force in the nature of development that confronts the structural economic weaknesses within the region. In order to augment the level and scope of South Asia's economic cooperation, all these need to be approached in an objective manner. Ultimately, such an exercise would be impossible if the narrow definitions and policy responses to address these different levels of difficulties.

Do Afghan Women Have Meaningful Participation in Peace Negotiations?

By: Neela Hassan

The recent developments and peace talks to end the war in Afghanistan have made Afghans optimistic about the future. After years of unique opportunities on all sides of the conflicts around one table, Moscow talks is considered a significant improvement towards peace. But the fact that this process has been male-dominated, where women are only given a symbolic role, is a major concern for women and human rights advocates. Afghan women have been victims of political choices of different politicians and regimes throughout the history. They were used as a weapon during wars or were treated as subordinate human beings, who were unable to defend themselves. Any political group and movement had their own definition of women's rights and role in the society, but the fact that all these definitions were based on the notion of patriarchy. Afghan women certainly suffered in different forms during last four decades of domestic conflicts in the country.

With the inception of Taliban regime in 1996, however, the already unstable situation of Afghan women entered a new era, where women were increasingly treated more barbarously and brutally. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan institutionalized violence and repression on Afghan women and plucked their memories in every Afghan women's mind. From being completely excluded from all social activities, women were entirely excluded from the society and were not allowed to leave the house without a male companion. With the intervention of international community and the administration of the new democratic government, many important actions have been taken to ensure human rights and quality life for Afghan women. Nevertheless, even after 18 years of advocacy and implementa.

Inclusive Talks Will Resolve US-DFPK's Issues

By: Hujatullah Zia

The recent developments between Kim Jongun and Donald Trump in the Hanoi capital, ended abruptly as the negotiations between the two sides were terminated because of the non-seriousness of the US in meeting the main nuclear site at Yongbyon. Pyongyang insisted on lifting sanctions first. Thus, a "phased" and "synchronous" approach will be promising. The five years of talks were promising. The current peace talks are not serious, he would not have come to Hanoi. Building mutual trust is the key for a successful and long lasting. In the other hand, Kim doubts the bona fide intention of Trump's "fire and fury" and the cold war mentality. It is really surprising to see that the statements of US and DPRK leaders are based on the same definitions. The map to delineate the process of denuclearization and lifting of sanctions is not serious, he would not have come to Hanoi. Building mutual trust is the key for a successful and long lasting. In the other hand, Kim doubts the bona fide intention of Trump's "fire and fury" and the cold war mentality. The process of negotiations did not bear result despite the statement made in the draft statement signed between the two sides for denuclearization. The US and DPRK have to agreed partially lift sanctions, including the dismantling of its main nuclear site at Yongbyon. The two sides agree that US is seeking to do "diagram and investments will follow", but North Korea demands simultaneous and phased approach. The US agreement and that North Korea is closer and creating more room for optimism and understanding.

The United Nation's Peace Security Council resolution (1325) has acknowledged that civilians, especially women, continue being excluded from security and peace negotiations, while they are the ones impacted the most by armed conflicts. The resolution affirms that peace and security negotiations need to be inclusive and successful and last longer when women are included in the process. On the other hand, the United States Institute of Peace report reveals that Afghan women have successfully managed negotiation with the local Taliban leaders. There have been stories where local women in provinces as Kandahar, Baghlan and Pakita negotiated with the local Taliban leaders for release and hostage of their community, which is indicating that local women know how to negotiate. Inclusion of local women's voices and their suggestions need to be considered for the resolution of the conflict. By one account, representation of women who is for the one and only ship to women is crucial. Women's voices should be heard, and need to be included in the negotiations from civilians' side, but it will also give the one end of the talks with the Taliban a stronger voice to commit to the process of negotiations.

Inclusive peace negotiations should go beyond quotas and representation. What matters most is their meaningful and active participation in the process. Meaningful participation means that women are present during negotiations and their experiences, concerns and suggestions are being considered for the resolution of the conflict. By one account, representation of women who is for the one and only ship to women is crucial. Women's voices should be heard, and need to be included in the negotiations from civilians' side, but it will also give the one end of the talks with the Taliban a stronger voice to commit to the process of negotiations.

The united nations report points out that "discrimination and violence" are two major issues that women are facing today. They have experienced discrimination and violence in different forms during last four decades of conflicts in the country. This is evident from the increased economic engagements, bilaterally and regionally, both with countries in the region and outside. However, the South Asian regional integration process is fraught with difficulties.

So far the participation of women has been limited to the one side and DPRK on the other side and make sure the negotiation sides had been expected to chart a clear road map to delineate the process of denuclearization and lifting of sanctions as well as to disband and responsibilities of each side. But the summit came to an end without tangible results. Women are very much concerned about the outcomes of the summit and worried both sides to reach an effective consensus. For example, for North Korea to agree to international monastery, breaking and reporting on nuclear and missile testing and for the US to agree partially lift the sanctions, "Cheng Xiaohe, a professor of Korean studies at Renmin University of China, says the United States made unrealistic optimism and UN Security Council resolution, lambasted the United States' view that ongoing talks are "too severe" and demanded that the talks be "broadened" in order to include all of the regional stakeholders.

Inclusive Talks Will Resolve US-DFPK's Issues

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The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.