

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind


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Anti-Polio Campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghanistan is one of the three polio endemic countries in the world, alongside Pakistan and Nigeria. Last year, 21 wild poliovirus cases were reported in Afghanistan while 12 cases in Pakistan and zero in Nigeria, which indicates that Nigeria has controlled the poliovirus and now there are only Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As of October 16, there were a total of 88 polio paralysis cases in the two countries. They comprise a single large outbreak, because most cases are in the tribal areas along the border, where local people easily cross back and forth.

A total of 72 cases of polio have been reported so far in Pakistan, 53 were reported from KP, eight from Sindh, six from Baluchistan and five from Punjab, which shows an increase comparing to the last year. In Afghanistan, however, 16 cases of polio have been reported.

With this in mind, the Afghan health officials have launched an extended subnational immunization campaign to give polio immunity vaccination dose to 8.5 million children under five years old.

However, refusal against the polio vaccine began increasing on religious basis, mainly in Pakistan. After Shakil Afridi, who helped the United States Central Intelligence Agency to find Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad Pakistan, ran a hepatitis vaccine program, resistance to the polio vaccine increased there. "Refusals again increased this year because of propaganda against the vaccine by a school in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," Pakistan's CII Chairman Dr. Qibla Ayaz is cited as saying. According to him, around 30pc of polio vaccination refusals are made on religious grounds while the remaining 70pc are for political or other reasons in Pakistan.

Last year in Pakistan, rumors spread on social media saying the vaccine had triggered fainting spells - or even that it had killed dozens of children - and many families locked their doors to vaccinators or hid their children. The Times of London said last year that a Pakistani man returning from work and divorcing his wife on the spot after finding their children's fingers marked with the indelible ink used by polio vaccinators.

Although Afghanistan has seen an incredible achievement over the past decade in reducing the number of polio cases, there are some obstacles before the anti-polio campaign similar to Pakistan. For instance, it is said that some parents believe that vaccines are not safe, or not halal, and refuse to have their children vaccinated. Simultaneously, families do not see the immediate necessity of immunization when they also lack access to basic services such as clean water and food. Third, the ongoing conflict also hamper the campaign against polio. Since May 2018, a ban on the house-to-house immunization strategy in most of the Southern region, including Kandahar, Helmand, and Uruzgan has led to an upsurge in the number of inaccessible children. Moreover, the Taliban are also against the anti-polio campaign and hampered the activities.

"We are concerned that following the long pause in polio vaccination in parts of the country, more children have become vulnerable to polio virus, therefore it is of paramount importance that we vaccinate those who have been missing out," the Ministry of Public Health said in a statement.

To overcome the challenges, more than 70,000 front-line workers are reportedly recruited from their communities, during nationwide campaigns, to deliver house-to-house vaccines. The program also works with influential individuals in the communities, including religious leaders, to mobilize and convince people to have their children vaccinated. Refusal Oversight Committees have been formulated at national and provincial level to systematically guide, monitor, and track progress of reduction of refusals.

About 96pc of the country is polio free and the virus is geographically restricted. Despite the challenges, Afghanistan has made great strides in decreasing the number of polio cases.

Politicizing the issue of polio or painting it with religious brush will harm a nation.

Public Concerns over Rise of Criminal Offences in Crowded Cities of Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After a few months of relatively calm, once again the number of criminal and terrorist assassinations has increased in Afghanistan, especially inside large city of the country. Most of the victims are government employees, businessperson and also political activists. In last 24 hours, 4 murder cases reported from the capital city of Kabul while there are also individuals who wounded as a result of armed attacks. Citizens are increasingly worried about the increase of kidnaps and assassinations while some the previous perpetrators who committed crimes in recent years remain unknown. Although some of the incidents are claimed by armed opposition groups, security agencies have not been able to identify the rest of perpetrators and still remain unidentified. A according to a quarterly report released by the Central Statistics Organization's reports (CSO) shows that more than 4000 incidents occurred in the first three months of the year across the country. According to the report, the highest crime rates and criminal incidents are recorded in major cities such as Kabul and the least in remote provinces.

However, the recent reports show that murder and assassination is not just confined to the capital cities. Thus, the victims do not belong to a certain group and it includes businesspersons, investors, banker, politician and also government employees, especially the judiciary system personnel. One day ago, 4 bank employees were kidnapped in Herat province while the perpetrators have not been identified yet. Two days ago (Saturday), Hayatuddin Saheb, a well-known cleric of the country, was gunned down in Balkh province. On the same day, Mohammad Haqparast, the deputy chief prosecutor of the Parwan District, was shot dead by unknown persons in the Dowlana village of Charikar, the center of Parwan province. In addition, it was reported that Abdul Momen Nusrat, the deputy chief of the Ghor District Prosecutor's Office, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen in Firozkow of Ghor province. There were also reports that judiciary officials were attacked in Nangarhar and Zabul provinces while perpetrators have been unidentified in most cases.

Unfortunately, this situation has negatively impacted capital flow and investment in the country. Private sectors always express their concerns about growing threats against their lives. According to some analysts, the situation is the outcome of political instability in the country which has increased threats against the business community. Political instability and insecurity have been the biggest challenges on the way of private sector's activities and investment development. Extortion and kidnapping have increased due to political instability and insecurity and has prevented the private sector from improving. While we are fighting against terrorists we should also not forget to seek sustainable solution for crime reduction in the country. From one hand, we need to decisively enforce law and on the other hand, we must rout out the fueling factors such as unemployment, corruption and so on.

Overall, the rise of assassinations in the capital and other major cities has raised concerns among citizens. They regard securing and public order as the primary tasks of the government and call on the responsible authorities to take effective measures to prevent such events. Many citizens believe that criminal events and armed assassination will not be stopped unless the Ministry of the Interior decides to prohibit selling, buying and carrying of weapons across the country while the acting minister said today that weapons and armored vehicle should be legalized as solution to reduction of criminal offences. People call on ministry of Internal Affairs to take effective measures to prevent assassinations and systematic crimes in country. Thus, many others believe that assassinations are happened due to the insufficiency of the security forces because security forces do not control irresponsible armed people from patrolling in the cities.

However, Kabul police have had some good achievements in the beginning of the current years. Kabul police had arrested several dangerous groups with their dangerous devices and weapons in the capital city. According to reports released few months, more than 100,000 cases of crimes have been registered in the Ministry over the past five years. More than 115,000 suspects have been arrested in connection with different crimes but feedback cannot satisfy people. Some of people appreciate security forces as they prevented from many dangerous events but they also expect them to bring enough changes in social security situation, especially Kabul.

But according to some experts, putting the hungry offender in prison is not a good solution and this will never decrease the social insecurity in the country. The more unemployed provinces have the more social crimes so if we increase job opportunities no one would go to crimes. Therefore, unemployment issue is the root most problems in the country. Unfortunately, there is no effective strategy for unemployment reduction and even there is no accurate assessment to show the exact unemployment status in the country. Based on some estimates there are around 82% of the youths are suffering from joblessness in the country. However, the CSO reports indicate of a lower level.

By and large, the social crimes have a direct link with unemployment in Afghanistan. Unemployment is also associated with elevated rates of mental and physical health problems. It increases morbidity and mortality rates, and can cause detrimental changes in family relationships and in the psychological well-being of families. Scientific studies have already pointed out that unemployment can contribute to increased rates of suicide and reduced life expectancy. As final point, unemployment will not only increase the social crimes but also cause many other troubles in the country.

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The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: Dynamics, Status Quo and Prospects

By: Lin Youhong, Wang Yuhao, Li Gen

Nearly three years after its launch, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) has been labeled a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). And the press, particularly in India, has been full of it when it proposed. Conversely, the current coverage of the AAGC is tepid. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the dynamics, status quo and the prospect of the AAGC objectively.

The concept of the AAGC first appeared in a joint statement, which issued by Indian Prime Minister Modi during his visit to Japan with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November 2016. In the India-Japan Joint Statement, the two states noted the importance of developing bilateral relations, regional economic ties, connectivity and infrastructure networks with other states. And the prospects of cooperation between India and Japan, states in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa and other adjacent regions such as Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka were also discussed. At the 52nd Board of Governors African Development Bank (AfDB) conference, held at Gujarat India in May 2017, the governments of India and Japan jointly released a report entitled the "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development A Vision Document". This report marked the official launch of the AAGC, which is a joint initiative of India and Japan that aimed at rediscovering ancient sea transport routes and creating new ocean corridors that link Africa with South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The dynamics of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

The current dynamics of the AAGC comes from two aspects: On the one hand, the development of bilateral relations between India and Japan, the strategic alignment between the two states and demands of developing the domestic economy, as well as confronting China's BRI, have made India and Japan the main leaders of AAGC. The two states expect to form a developing cooperation model of "India-Japan leading, multi-states participation".

First, relations between India and Japan have become stronger since Modi took office in 2014. India and Japan issued the Tokyo Declaration entitled "Japan-India Special Strategic Global Partnership" in September 2014. At the same time, India PM Modi and Japanese PM Abe exchanged frequent visits, forming a characteristic summit diplomacy between Japan and India. Frequent visits between the two nations also promote the sustainable development of India-Japan relations. In addition, Africa is the "ticket bunker" of the United Nations. Helping Africa is the best way to get support from Africa to achieve a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. This became the political foundation for India and Japan to jointly promote the AAGC.

Second, in the Indo-Pacific region, Modi's Act East policy for East Asia, Think West strategy and Security and Growth for All in the Region policy (SAGAR), coincide with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. Promoting the AAGC is the substantive product of the strategic alignment between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region.

Third, India, which has a good history and a sound basis for cooperation with Africa, cannot expand its cooperation with Africa because of financial and technical problems. Japan has advanced technology and capital, but lacks market and needs energy. Therefore, the two states have formed complementary advantages in the joint development of cooperation with Africa. To promote domestic economic development has become a real need to promote the AAGC.

Fourth, India and Japan want to create an Indian-Japanese version of the "Belt and Road" initiative to counter China's BRI and influence in this region. Since BRI has been launched, India has considered the Sino-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project under the BRI to infringe upon its sovereignty and territorial integrity. India has so far refused to join the BRI and wanted to expand regional influence through the AAGC.

On the other hand, states in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa generally have faced problems such as poor infrastructure and weak domestic economic development. And they need a lot of financial and technical support. The vision document of AAGC lays down four important pillars of connectivity and cooperation: development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and skills, people-to-people partnerships, which meet the development needs of these states. Moreover, some states have been trumpeted by the Western media, fearing that BRI is a "debt-trap diplomacy" and will infringe on their

national sovereignty. And the AAGC offers an alternative option for these states.

Status Quo and Progress of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

First, in South Asia, Japan is actively involved in India's industrial corridor and infrastructure projects in the North-East. During Modi's visit to Japan in 2018, the two states issued a joint statement that they would strengthen cooperation in the construction of roads and bridges between the Ramgarh and Baraiyarahat in Bangladesh, and construction a railway bridge across the Jamuna River. While in Sri Lanka, they will cooperate on liquefied natural gas-related infrastructure projects. Second, in Southeast Asia, India and Japan team up to create the Mekong-India economic corridor, to cooperate on housing, education and electrification projects in Rakhine State. Third, in Africa, India and Japan will cooperate on the Mombasa corridor. Fourth, in the Indian Ocean, India and Japan will cooperate to develop islands and ports. They will also explore potential new shipping routes in the Indian Ocean region. However, apart from Japan's active participation in the Indian industrial corridor and infrastructure projects in the North-East, much of these cooperation have remained at the consultation and plan stage.

From the implementation of the AAGC, there was only one project under construction in May 2019, which was the port of Colombo Container Terminal. Therefore, the AAGC proposed so far, not yet formed the "India-Japan leading, multi-states participation" model.

Prospects for the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

First, from a strategic perspective, Japan and India have a profound geo-political and geo-economic driving force to push forward the AAGC. And both states are in the period of "strongman politics", so they have a strong will to push forward foreign strategies. In particular, as China continues to press ahead with BRI, pressure on Japan and India has increased accordingly. Thus, high hopes are placed on the AAGC, which has the potential to become an alternative to the BRI. But in the long term, the "strongman politics" in the short-term is difficult to ensure the two states to promote the long-term AAGC. In addition, India and Japan have different strategic demands for the AAGC for the sake of national interests, which is also the main obstacle to this vision. For example, in October 2018, Japan launched third-party market cooperation with China, selectively participating in China's BRI.

Second, from the cooperation basis perspective, both India and Japan have the basis and ties for cooperation with Africa. India and Japan can jointly carry out cooperation with Africa on the basis of their respective areas of cooperation and promote the AAGC. However, India and Japan also face the challenge of a lack of cooperation experience. On the one hand, Japan's experience is largely limited to official development assistance, whereas India has not yet developed such a large and extensive network of cooperation projects; on the other hand, India has a complex internal bureaucracy. Thus, inefficiencies are also affecting cooperation between India and Japan. Besides, India also faces the challenge of insufficient funds and domestic development pressures.

Third, from the cooperation willingness of the states along the route, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa need huge investment and technical support. The AAGC can offer these states an alternative option for cooperation. During the design and plan stage of the AAGC, some states which came from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa, participated in the discussion and design, showing that the AAGC has a certain realistic foundation. But once the AAGC is labeled as a counterweight to China, states along the route will face a choice of sides and there is no need for states along the route to sacrifice China in exchange for cooperation with India and Japan.

Conclusion

The AAGC is an "India-Japan leading, multi-states participation" developing model, promoted by India and Japan in East Asia, South Asia, and Africa, with the intention of counteracting BRI. From its progress, the initiative itself is "concept-driven", which means that there is no concrete implementation but it is the policy guide for India and Japan. From its prospects, the development of the AAGC depends on the long-term nature of the strategic alignment between India and Japan, the effectiveness of practical cooperation between the two countries on the basis of their respective advantages and the willingness of the countries along the route.

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