



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES
(CENJOWS)

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024



AFGHANISTAN WATCH

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 1

**India-Taliban Thaw
On Afghanistan:
What Really Is
Happening?**

**Why has China
Recognised
Taliban's Envoy to
Beijing?**

**Foreign Aid Drops
Sharply As Taliban
Abuses Jeopardize
The Afghan Health
System**

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Foreign Aid Drops Sharply As Taliban Abuses Jeopardize The Afghan Health System

<https://apnews.com/article/hrw-foreign-aid-afghan-health-taliban-e7202c08f2ad4f6eed3df20f55d343a>

As per Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan's public health system has been hit hard following a sharp reduction in foreign assistance, coupled with serious Taliban abuses against women and girls, jeopardizing the right to healthcare of millions of Afghans. This has left the Afghan population increasingly vulnerable to severe malnutrition and illness among other effects of inadequate medical care.

Comments

Over the previous two decades, the Afghan government had relied upon international development support from donors to fund essential services like primary health care. While Afghans living in poverty have always faced difficulties obtaining health care because of costs, a rising number of Afghans now struggle to pay for food and are often unable to cover the price of medicines and transportation to reach health services.

The United Nations estimates that 23.7 million people - more than half of Afghanistan's population - will need humanitarian assistance in 2024. While humanitarian agencies provide life-saving assistance, they cannot replace all the essential services that had previously depended on donor support.[1] Even before the Taliban takeover there were few donors to provide healthcare services in major cities of Afghanistan. Post US withdrawal from Afghanistan, majority of aid from Western countries and international organisations in the healthcare sector have dried up wherein immigrants deportation by Pakistan, worsening economic health and natural calamities have further aggravated the dire conditions of populace in Afghanistan. The Taliban's restrictive policies further impede access to services for women and girls with disabilities. The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and work and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power. Taliban restrictions on women's freedom of movement and employment have gravely limited their access to health services, the HRW report said, while bans on education have blocked almost all training of future female healthcare workers in the country[2].

[1] Bram Janssen @ HRW , February 12, 2024, "Afghanistan: Aid Cutbacks, Taliban Abuses Imperil Health", Accessed on 15 Feb 24, URL : <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/12/afghanistan-aid-cutbacks-taliban-abuses-imperil-health>

[2] Associated Press @ Feb 12, 2024, US News, "Foreign Aid Drops Sharply as Taliban Abuses Jeopardize the Afghan Health System, Group Says", Accessed on 15 Feb 24, URL : <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2024-02-12/foreign-aid-drops-sharply-as-taliban-abuses-jeopardize-the-afghan-health-system-group-says>

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Indian Support

India has been one of the primary donors of reconstruction aid to Afghanistan, ever since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Since then, it has helped rebuild hospitals, provided medicines, and conducted trainings for Afghan doctors. One of the most crucial problems during the Taliban regime had been the rising child and maternal mortality rates. India contributed significantly to address this concern by reopening the IGHCH in 2003, which had been closed in 1992 due to the war. Further, India added to the IGHCH a three-storey surgical block, followed by the polyclinic block in 2007, and later equipped the diagnostic block with modern facilities. India also set up neonatal and maternity care units. At present, the IGHCH is the largest pediatric hospital in Afghanistan and treats over 300,000 children annually[3].

In spite of Afghanistan being hub of terrorist organization and various attacks against India, Indian government has been continuously supporting healthcare system of war torn country due to historical and strategic relationship between two nations. There is an urgent requirement of Western world to pitch in and increase medical aid before any outbreak of health disaster and catastrophe take place in populace of Afghanistan.

Why has China Recognised Taliban's Envoy to Beijing?

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/is-chinas-recognition-of-afghanistan-envoy-a-diplomatic-win-for-taliban>

After over two years of negotiations, China recognised Bilal Karimi, a former Taliban spokesman, as an official envoy to Beijing, making Xi's government the first in the world to do so since the group seized power in Afghanistan in 2021.



Source: *The Economic Times*

[3] Sohini Bose @ May 24, 2023, ORF, " Bridging the healthcare gap in Afghanistan: A primer on India's role" , Accessed on 16 Feb 24, URL : <https://www.orfonline.org/research/bridging-the-healthcare-gap-in-afghanistan-a-primer-on-indias-role-64703>

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Comments

While China is the first country to recognise a Taliban ambassador, several other countries including Russia, Iran, Turkey and India have made efforts to engage with the Taliban, not only on humanitarian projects but also by reopening their diplomatic missions/ technical group in Kabul. In spite of not forming an all inclusive government, imposing severe restrictions and supporting terrorist organisations, it is becoming difficult for regional as well international players to refrain from engagement with Taliban government.

Chinese Perspective

China has been making inroads into Afghanistan through investments and projects since the United States withdrew forces from the country in 2021, triggering a collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government and paving the way for the Taliban to return to power. But as the news of Beijing's formal acceptance of the Taliban on January 30 spread, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was quick to issue a statement, clarifying that the acceptance of diplomatic credentials did not signal Beijing's official recognition of Afghanistan's current rulers[4]. The Taliban government has not been officially recognised by any country since seizing power after the chaotic withdrawal of US troops in August 2021. However, Kabul and Beijing have maintained some ties since then. Afghanistan's new rulers have promised the country would not be used as a base for militants and, in exchange, China has offered economic support and investment for reconstruction. In 2023, several Chinese companies signed multiple business deals with the Taliban government. The most prominent among them was a 25-year-long, multimillion-dollar oil extraction contract with an estimated investment value of \$150m in the first year, and up to \$540m over the next three years. However, this aid and recognition from China will certainly be not without cost. Infamous debt trap of China and fiscal deficit history of many developing economies consequent to that has compelled the Taliban regime to accept Chinese help immediately at any cost.

Indian Perspective

Though India has not recognized the Taliban government, however it continues to operate a technical team in Kabul since June 2022 primarily for humanitarian purposes and to provide diplomatic assistance. Keeping aggressive Chinese efforts

[4] Ruchi Kumar @ 14 Feb 2024, AlJazeera, "Why has China recognised Taliban's envoy to Beijing?", Accessed on 16 Feb 24, URL : <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/is-chinas-recognition-of-afghanistan-envoy-a-diplomatic-win-for-taliban>

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

Indian Perspective

Though India has not recognized the Taliban government, however it continues to operate a technical team in Kabul since June 2022 primarily for humanitarian purposes and to provide diplomatic assistance. Keeping aggressive Chinese efforts to build in roads in the Taliban government, India will have to tread a cautious approach while not according to legitimacy to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as per its democratic values and in the meantime secure its security, economic and geo-strategic, interests by maintaining functional relations with the Taliban.

India-Taliban Thaw On Afghanistan: What Really Is Happening?

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indiataliban-thaw-on-afghanistan-what-really-is-happening-101707110103889.html>

From ominous premonitions in 2021 when the Taliban came to power to Feb 2024, New Delhi has come a long way in Kabul. In August 2021, India pulled out all its diplomats and officials from the country after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. By June 2022, New Delhi had re-established diplomatic presence in the country by deploying a 'technical' team at the Indian mission in capital Kabul.

Comments

Though Taliban regime has been yearning for recognition from other nations since August 2021, but no major world power has shown any inclination towards the same due to abysmal record of previous Taliban regime. During their Second tenure, the Taliban regime has been making all out efforts to sell to the world opportunities available in their country without compromising on core values of Islamic rule to include Sharia Law. In spite of India not recognizing the Taliban regime as valid government of Afghanistan, India was among 10 countries that participated in a Regional Cooperation Initiative meeting of diplomatic representatives convened by the Taliban administration in Kabul, reflecting the growing engagement between the two sides.

11. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, Afghanistan's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, a key Taliban member has been trained in Indian Military establishments for more than three years. According to Ashok Sajjanhar, former Indian ambassador to Kazakhstan, Sweden, and Latvia, "India has a half-way house in Kabul. Unlike China and some other countries that have recognized the Taliban government, India does not have diplomatic ties with the government in Kabul. However, unlike, as earlier thought, the threat of terror attacks on India at the behest of Pakistan from Afghan soil have receded. In fact, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have soured[5]".

[5] Ranjit Bhushan @ 05 Feb 2024, HT, "India-Taliban thaw on Afghanistan: What really is happening?", Accessed on 16 Feb 24, URL : <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indiataliban-thaw-on-afghanistan-what-really-is-happening-101707110103889.html>

FEBRUARY 1-15 2024

AFGHANISTAN WATCH

World View

Most of the Western governments do not formally recognise the Taliban administration, notably over its treatment of women in the country. But there is little pressure or desire to once again get involved in the country with their focus primarily on the Russia – Ukraine and Israel – Hamas wars.

Indian Perspective

India needs to maintain a neutral stance on recognizing the Taliban government as of now keeping its strategic interests foremost. Though historical, cultural, economic and emotional connections with Afghanistan prior to the Taliban regime are very strong however current security challenges, resurgence of Al Qaeda strongholds on Afghan soil, ever-increasing influence of China and the changing world order have been posing far too many challenges in front of India. Apropos it is recommended that India while maintaining cordial and functional relations with all stakeholders, must continue to engage diplomatically as well economically keeping its own interests paramount.

By
Col Rajesh Grover
Senior Fellow, CENJOWS