

AFGHANISTAN

Reluctant donors

Experts reckon that it will cost \$15 billion over ten years to rebuild Afghanistan. Donors have pledged more than \$4.5 billion at a conference this week. Raising the rest, collecting what has been pledged so far, and spending it wisely will be difficult, but essential if Afghanistan is to be prevented from slipping back into anarchy



Guns and aid...

THIS week the rich countries of the world pledged more than \$4.5 billion towards the task of rebuilding Afghanistan, including a commitment of \$1.8 billion this year. Most of this money is coming from Japan, the hosts of a special conference, and its three fellow sponsors; America, the European Union and Saudi Arabia. Japan's prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, kicked off the conference with a promise that it would give up to \$500m over the next two-and-a-half years.

The UN estimates that total costs will be around \$5 billion over that period, covering a six-month interim government and then an elected transitional government. Overall, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reckon that \$15 billion will be needed for the task over the next decade. However, collecting and spending even the third that has been pledged so far will prove difficult enough.

The purpose of the conference was the long-term rebuilding of the physical and institutional infrastructure in Afghanistan. The country still has pressing short-term needs: millions of Afghans are living outside the country as refugees, or have been displaced inside the country's borders, and many are close to starving.

However, food aid is now flowing into the country again. "Humanitarian relief is already being supplied, short-term recovery is being planned, and now the long-term rebuilding of the country has to be addressed with the same determination," says Mark Malloch Brown, administrator of the UNDP programme in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan lacks roads, schools and hospitals, a functioning police and judicial system, a trusted currency and a central bank. The country will have to be cleared of mines: alone will cost \$500m, according to the World Bank. Houses, factories and offices, destroyed by more than two decades of bombing, will have to be rebuilt. The land, prone to drought, needs to be properly irrigated. Foreign governments would also like to see Afghanistan



Karzai in Tokyo...

return to being a land of orchards, rather than one filled with opium poppies.

Apart from these essential works, the interim government would also like to rebuild the national museum and re-erect two fifth-century Buddhas destroyed by the Taliban last year in their fanatical quest for a deluded idea of Islamic purity. Western governments are also determined that women will play a much bigger role in Afghan society than they have been allowed under the repressive Taliban regime. This would include a say in community development as well as education.

So far, the international community and especially members of the American administration has been warm in its support for the new Afghan government. "We are committed to doing everything we can to assist you in this time of transition to a new Afghanistan, an Afghanistan where people will be able to live in peace and security," declared Colin Powell, America's secretary of state, to Hamid Karzai, the new Afghan leader, on a visit to Kabul on January 17th.

At the Tokyo conference, Mr Powell pledged \$296m in aid for this year and, perhaps in an attempt to tie his colleagues' hands, said: "President Bush, the Congress of the United States, the American people fully recognise that this is the first contribution to what must be and will be a multi-year effort." But, despite Mr Powell's good intentions, American administrations are not keen on giving development aid. The American contribution towards rebuilding Afghanistan is less than one-sixth of the amount pledged for this year in total.

The United States had already slipped to the bottom of the list of members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for aid donations as a proportion of national income even before George Bush was elected. America gives just 0.1% of GDP, compared to a UN goal of 0.7%. Before September 11th, the Bush administration showed little appetite for "nation-building".

Even now, despite what Mr Powell may say, administration spokesmen



Only hunger remains...

have been saying that it has done more than its fair share in paying for the bulk of the military campaign in Afghanistan. So far, what American aid efforts there have been have seemed aimed more at reassuring a domestic audience than at helping the Afghans. Apart from the infamous peanut butter dropped by bombers, money donated by American children was used to buy hairbrushes, sweets and toys for Afghans' most pressing needs.

One American aid bill, introduced last month, called for \$1.6 billion of aid for Afghanistan over four years. However, only half of that sum would be for Afghan reconstruction, as the total includes money to rebuild the American embassy and a big anti-drugs programme.

Of the \$296m pledged by Mr Powell this week, around half had already been allocated. Moreover, despite the advice of many relief agencies, which would prefer to see aid delivered centrally, via the new government in Kabul, most of American aid will be delivered bilaterally. And, while Mr Powell is keen that America's help continues over the years, the Bush administration has declined to make any promises beyond the first year.

Hamid Karzai, the leader of Afghanistan's interim government, bluntly complained to delegates: "While we understand the procedural requirements for the delivery of international aid, unfortunately we have seen little signs from the international community in response to our urgent needs."

Having seen how money has been wasted in several recipient countries, not least Somalia, the worry about aid being wasted or, worse, used to support corrupt regimes, is a widespread one. The EU has pledged 200m (\$177m) this year, with the aim of giving 1 billion over five years in addition to national commitments that are worth around 350m this year. Chris Patten, the EU's commissioner for external affairs, warned that "we shall have to convince our budgetary authority year by year of the case for this priority."

Clare Short, the British international development secretary, believes that it will be difficult for Afghanistan to absorb more than \$5 billion in aid over the first five years, simply because it does not have the systems to adminis-



Housing for the Afghans...

ter it. Collecting the money is going to be problematic as well. The UN has found it tough to raise even the comparatively tiny sums that the new Afghan government needs to keep itself going. When the UN asked for an initial \$20m after the conference in Bonn last month which established the interim government, \$18m was pledged, but less than \$10m paid. The government, which says it has a "zero budget", needs \$100m to meet basic running costs, such as paying civil servants who have effectively been working as volunteers. However, despite the \$1.8 billion raised by donors, it appears that less than \$100m of that is destined directly for the government. Afghanistan's plight will be eased when America releases more than \$200m in frozen Afghan assets, mainly reserves held in gold at the Federal Reserve, to the Afghan central bank.

The gold had been withheld because America did not recognise the Taliban as a legitimate government. Afghanistan is also likely to be able to start collecting overflight fees from commercial airlines, of around \$23m a year.

However, few think it likely that the country will be able to collect taxes any time soon.

What may yet prod Americans into rethinking their level of aid is the rather obvious point that letting Afghanistan slip back into anarchy would be the surest way to turn it, once again, into a haven for terrorists. Not only justice, but hard-headed pragmatism would seem to indicate that financing the rebuilding of the country now, even if America has to assume a disproportionate amount of the cost, would be cheaper than cleaning up after more terrorist outrages such as those on September 11th, and going to war yet again to find and punish the culprits.

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For a united Afghanistan

What Afghanistan needs most for preserving its independence and unity is time to discover its own balance between federal decentralisation and centralisation for unity...

PRAN CHOPRA

IN COMPARISON with all its immediate neighbours Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, China to the east, and Pakistan to the east and the south Afghanistan is most in need of a federal system. But, paradoxically, it also has reasons to be the most wary of it, and left to its present misgivings it may well opt for a unitary system although the spirit of the federal alternative is more akin to its historical experience.

In all of its neighbours, the powers of the Government are tightly centralised in their respective capitals. But not so in Afghanistan, because centralisation of authority is unsuited to its geography, demography and polity. Geographically, Afghanistan has some distinctly different regions, each with its own external orientation. Demographically, it is divided into distinct ethnic and tribal groups, and most of them are also quite distinct territorially.

Because of this combination of ethnic with territorial identity, each of these regions has also developed its own political identity and all have exercised autonomy in varying degrees. It is quite remarkable that in spite of these internal cleavages Afghanistan has developed quite a hardy Afghan identity.

On the face of it, this makes a

federal structure ideal for the country, in which a national identity and governing authority seated in the national capital coexists with a power sharing system which leaves sufficient autonomy for regional identities. It demarcates one region's domain of power from that of the other regions and of all regions from that of the national Government. But such is the power of the Afghan paradox that it makes the country worry whether it can afford the latitudes which the national capital normally concedes to the regions in a federal system.

The worry has its reasons. History has left overlaps between each of the main regions of Afghanistan and one or another country on the other side of the border. The overlap may be ethnic, religious, cultural, or geographical but in each case is something of a bridgehead which one or other neighbour has inside Afghanistan. In every such case, the neighbour is stronger than the corresponding Afghan region or, in some cases, stronger than even Afghanistan as a whole. Stronger militarily, or economically or in its size or its population, and has a more deep rooted cultural or historical identity.

Thus a large north-south strip of western Afghanistan, not very broad but running along almost the whole length of Afghanistan, has such an overlap with Iran, which is perhaps the strongest country west of India

and east of Turkey. Iran also has pockets of an overlap deeper inside Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has a very narrow but very long strip of a bridgehead in the northwest. Uzbekistan has a much broader one much deeper inside Afghanistan.

Most of mountainous northern region of Afghanistan, home of the victorious Northern Alliance which routed the Taliban in the recent conflict in Afghanistan, is an extension of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The overlap with China is minute but the one with Pakistan is the largest, broadest, deepest throughout the east and the south. Much bigger in size and population than any other, this overlap has the same Pashtun population as has a large part of north-western and western Pakistan.

Therefore Kabul, the weakest of national capitals in the whole region of southern central Asia, has reasons to wonder in which direction will the pull work between one of its regions and the corresponding neighbour if Kabul remained weak because of the natural logic of a federal system. This dilemma is not unique to Afghanistan. Most countries, cultures, population conglomerates spill over their political borders into neighbouring territories. But certain features peculiar to Afghanistan make Kabul's present worries more real.

Afghanistan has been at the crossroads of history. Armies have

marched across it or around it, and Afghanistan has always hung more or less precariously between the territories to its west, north-west and north from which these armies started out and those territories to its east and south-east which they colonised or tried to. For example, Alexander from Greece, in the south-west; Nadir Shah from Persia, in the west; Babar from Uzbekistan in the north-west; the Soviets from the north; and in a deeper past the Indian ruler Kanishka from the east, who was in fact retracing the route his Scythian-Parthian ancestors had taken to come to India from areas to the west and north-west of Afghanistan.

Kanishka also started a cultural era, in the 1st century AD, which produced the world famous Buddha statues of Bamiyan, which the Taliban destroyed recently, harming itself more by this one single act than by any other in its short but terrible history.

But none of these causes of Kabul's worry is as vivid, troubling and fresh in the minds of the rulers of present-day Afghanistan as are the two latest, both inflicted by Pakistan: the first when Zia-ul-Haq first propounded the military doctrine that Pakistan could use Afghanistan as its own "strategic depth" and then operationalised it through the structures he set up in his army; and second, the Taliban barbarity which Zia began to inflict

on Afghanistan as part of the American war on the Soviet Union, and which later military usurpers of political power in Pakistan perfected into a torture machine for the whole Afghan population.

An independent Afghanistan thus became a pawn in games played by America and Pakistan, and so it had remained till yesterday. Nor has the danger ended yet, because Pakistan's capacity to throw another Pashtun collar around the neck of Afghanistan remains in tact.

Therefore looking at its map in the light of its current, recent and older history, Afghanistan may decide to be guided more by the realities of power equations than by the wisdom of political theories of governance, and so might opt for a strongly centralised political authority. But the irony is that were it to do so, Afghanistan would in fact end up destroying the very unity it may seek to protect behind the shield of a centralised polity.

Such unity would only deny its diversities and thus weaken the bonds among them and between them and Kabul. For countries as pluralistic and diverse as Afghanistan and India are, unity and diversity are two sides of the same coin, and they are best conjoined in Nehru's phrase, "unity in diversity", which is the best tribute to federalism than has been minted by anyone. His philosophy became the

antidote for the threat of "linguistic nationalism" which India's linguistic diversity could have become to India's unity.

If this parallel with India is true, as I believe it is, what Afghanistan needs most for preserving its independence and unity is time to discover its own antidote, its own balance between federal decentralisation and centralisation for unity, before any neighbour can dare to

encroach upon it again. What India can contribute most to this discovery is its own experience of the nuts and bolts of federalism, but time for Afghanistan to digest the experience must be found for it by a U.N.-backed guarantee against any violation of its frontiers and inner space by any neighbour for any reason whatever.

The world must forge the guarantee while it still feels responsible for

the future of a country upon which it has only inflicted pain in the past. Otherwise, before Afghanistan can consolidate itself, it will be pried open with one excuse or another by one neighbour or other exploiting its bridgehead in this "round about of history".

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

A questionable strategy

As the war on terrorism comes to Southeast Asia, governments are joining in for their own gain. The consequences will not be benign...

BARRY WAIN in Singapore

AS THE UNITED STATES completes its military mission in Afghanistan, it is turning to Southeast Asia, convinced that the region is riddled with terrorists. The approaching campaign to weed out Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks, while regarded as necessary by Southeast Asian governments, is causing them considerable apprehension.

Still smarting from the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and buoyed by their swift demolition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Americans are opening a second front in their global war on terrorism. Initially, they'll send more than 650 troops to the southern Philippines to train local forces and join them on patrols against Muslim rebels. The fear is that the U.S. will lack the patience and subtlety needed to end the regional terrorist menace without destabilising fragile administrations and disturbing religious and ethnic sensitivities.

The storm that is about to break couldn't have come at a worse time, as countries in the region struggle with the second serious economic downturn in four years, while in some cases trying to cope with rapid political change and instability. Investors are likely to find new reasons to shun the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as the anti-terrorism drive creates more political problems for Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines and generates tensions within Asean.

The full impact of the anti-terrorist campaign, seen by some as a new Cold War, won't be clear for some time, but it is certain to make a region of profound diversity even more complicated. It already has altered the geopolitical landscape in East Asia-for example, by reducing friction between the U.S. and China, at least temporarily.

The extent of terrorism in Southeast Asia is the subject of sharp debate, if only because investigations are far from complete. Not everyone agrees with the dire threat seen by President George W. Bush's administration. In fact, Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, director-general of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Malaysia, says terrorist activity has "declined dramatically" in the region over the past few decades.

Since September 11, Singapore has uncovered what it says is an international Al Qaeda-linked organization, jailing 13 men who allegedly plotted for years to blow up U.S. and allied targets there. Singaporean authorities say the clandestine Jemaah Islamiyah has cells in Malaysia and Indonesia, but both countries deny it.

Beyond that, radical Islamic groups in neighbouring countries have members who trained in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and received funds, and these groups are developing closer contacts with each other. "All these others are essentially home-grown-a domestic phenome-

non-with external links," says Jawhar.

It is also hard to gauge the seriousness of the terrorist presence because of the blatant manipulation of the issue for political ends. Take Malaysia, the most egregious offender. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad early last year began jailing alleged Islamic militants supposedly planning to overthrow the government by force, most of them members of the main opposition party, Pas, which advocates the introduction of an Islamic state.

The government's continuing attempts to associate Pas with extremism appear to have succeeded. Significant numbers of ethnic Chinese and Indians, as well as some urban Malays, have deserted Pas for the government, according to a senior official of the Democratic Action Party, another opposition party. In addition, Mahathir has won high praise from Bush for contributing to the war on terrorism, without having to endure constant U.S. carping about the frequent use of the Internal Security Act, which provides for indefinite detention without trial.

Yet independent authorities point to inconsistencies that suggest the Malaysian government is taking advantage of the climate of fear over terrorism to discredit its legitimate opponents. For one thing, police and government officials say most of the dozens of detainees belong to a single outfit, split into two sections. They first identified it as the Malaysian Mujahideen Organization, but later switched-without explanation-to Malaysian Militant Organization, keeping the group's Malay initials, KMM.

Indonesia is under strong U.S. pressure to follow the example of Singapore and Malaysia and act decisively against Islamic militants, but President Megawati Sukarnoputri worries that a crackdown would be seen as an attack on Islam. Her dilemma showed up early, when she travelled to the White House in September to condemn terrorism forcefully, only to return to Jakarta and do little, as local sentiment opposed the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan.

When the Bush administration took office early last year, Southeast Asia fretted about being ignored. Now, front-line governments in the fight against terrorism, with the exception of the Philippines, are concerned to keep their distance from the U.S., or risk losing legitimacy. They have all made it clear that they don't want American combat forces on their soil. Any trampling on sovereignty, even in the Philippines, would likely provoke a nationalistic backlash.

The challenge for the U.S., say Southeast Asian officials, is to structure an approach that goes beyond military action and takes into account the complexity of dealing with terrorism, including its root causes. Particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, it must mean sticking around to ensure economic development and institution-building, says one official.

Courtesy: Far Eastern Economic Review.