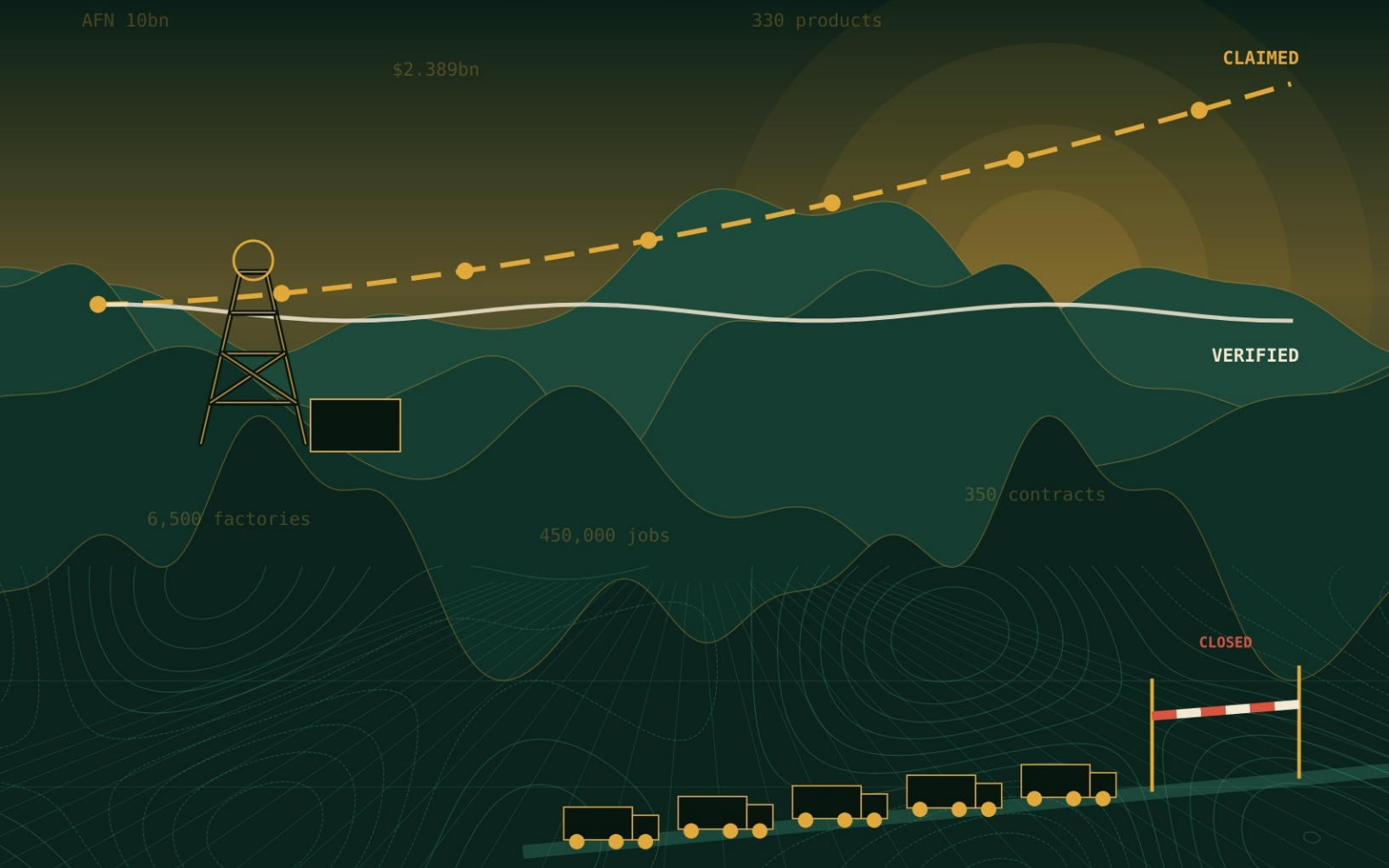
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SELF-SUFFICIENCY ON PAPER

Economic Claims of the Afghan Taliban and Ground Realities



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Edited by: SAT Research Desk

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ABOUT SAT BRIEFS

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KEY ARGUMENT

Five years after taking power, the Afghan Taliban present an economy on the road to self-sufficiency: hundreds of mining contracts, thousands of new factories, self-sufficiency in more than 300 products and a trade volume near $14 billion. Almost none of these claims can be checked. No full budget has been published since 2022, contract terms and revenues are not disclosed, and official figures shift sharply from one statement to the next. Where independent evidence exists, it points the other way: the World Bank counts roughly half the mining contracts Kabul claims, imports outweigh exports seven to one, three in four Afghans cannot meet their basic needs, and 21.9 million people need humanitarian aid in 2026. Some of the gains are real, but several reflect import substitution forced by the Taliban's own rupture with Pakistan rather than new productive capacity. The self-sufficiency narrative is best read as a political instrument: it claims performance in place of accountability, and it seeks recognition through the language of resources. For Pakistan, which bears the security costs of that rupture, the case for verifiable data, conditional reconnection and a monitored humanitarian lane is both principled and in its own interest.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 2 August 2026, the Taliban's Government Media and Information Center released its "Economy and Self-Sufficiency Week" figures: more than AFN 10 billion invested in mining, 350 mining projects, 174 new industrial companies, $2.389 billion in agreements and $13.901 billion in total trade. [1,2]
- The figures are internally inconsistent. Mining jobs were put at 200,000 in August and 180,000 in October; industrial jobs at 135,000 in June 2025 and 450,000 in August 2026; and the number of products in which Afghanistan is "self-sufficient" moved from 130 to 330 in just over a year. [1,3,4,5]
- Independent evidence contradicts the headline story. The World Bank recorded 183 mining contracts, many not yet operating; imports exceeded exports roughly seven to one; and only 11 of 34 industrial parks are operational. [6,2,7]
- Living standards have not followed the claims. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) finds 74 percent of Afghans unable to meet basic needs and more than 80 percent of households in debt; 21.9 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2026. [8,9]
- Part of the "self-sufficiency" is substitution forced by conflict: after Pakistan closed its crossings in October 2025 and Kabul banned Pakistani medicines in February 2026, domestic producers filled a gap that Pakistan had supplied. [10,11,5]
- Pakistan should keep its security conditionality but make it measurable, open a monitored humanitarian and medicines lane, and invest in independent economic monitoring of Afghanistan so that policy rests on evidence rather than announcements.

1. INTRODUCTION

After the change of power in August 2021, the Taliban made one idea central to their economic policy: Afghanistan would move from dependence on foreign aid to self-sufficiency. Officials argue that the country's mineral wealth, farmland and position on regional trade routes can pay for the state. The theme recurs in every economic statement: more mining contracts, more investment agreements, more factories, more exports and more revenue.

It would be wrong to dismiss these claims entirely. Some industrial projects have been built, many mineral contracts have been signed, the revenue system has kept functioning, and economic activity continues in several sectors. But economic performance cannot be judged by the number of contracts, investment announcements or factory registrations. The questions that matter are different: how much has actually been produced, how much capital has actually entered the country, how many lasting jobs exist, whether national income has risen, and whether ordinary Afghans live better.

This brief tests the Taliban's claims against those questions. It sets out what Kabul says, sector by sector, and compares it with what the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) agencies, satellite imagery and independent reporting show. It then examines what the gap means for Pakistan, whose border closure since October 2025 has become one of the most important forces acting on Afghanistan's economy, and closes with recommendations for Islamabad.

> Economic performance cannot be judged by contracts signed or factories registered, but by what reaches the ordinary citizen.

2. THE CLAIMS: WHAT KABUL SAYS

Since 2022, the Taliban have issued documents described as a budget and an annual decree in the name of their leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, containing statistics that cannot be independently verified. The most detailed recent set came on 2 August 2026, when the Government Media and Information Center marked "Economy and Self-Sufficiency Week" with figures for the Hijri year 1447. [1] Table 1 summarises them.

Sector	Claim (1447 AH)	What the claim does not show
Mining	AFN 10 billion+ invested; 45 new mineral sites; 350 projects tendered or licensed; 50,000 direct jobs, 200,000 in total	Spending versus contract value; output; revenue to the treasury
Industry	174 new companies in 16 sectors; $34 million invested; 2,804 jeribs allocated to 576 factories; customs exemptions on 1.75 million tonnes of inputs and 1,329 machines	Which factories produce, at what capacity, with how many workers
Investment	150 memoranda of understanding (MoUs), trade agreements and contracts worth $2.389 billion	Investors, binding status, money actually transferred
Trade	$13.901 billion total: $1.722 billion exports, $12.178 billion imports	The trade deficit the figures themselves reveal
Agriculture	600 tonnes of improved wheat seed; 1,001 jeribs of drip-irrigated orchards; 21,400 tonnes of wheat bought; 3.9 million tonnes of milk; 18.6 million saplings	Yields, prices, farm incomes and food access
Transport	12,832 flights; 1.57 million passengers; 46.6 million tonnes of goods by land; 60 projects begun, 21 completed	Costs, financing and project scale
Banking	Afghani up 6.01 percent; AFN 409 billion in circulation; 141,889 jobs financed by banks	Credit, deposits and access to finance

Source: Government Media and Information Center, 2 August 2026; Xinhua, 2 August 2026. A jerib is about 0.2 hectares.

Two features stand out. First, almost every figure is an input (contracts signed, land allocated, exemptions granted) rather than an output (production, revenue, wages). Second, none comes with the documents needed to check it: no contract registry, no audited accounts and, since March 2022, no full published budget. The claims function as announcements of performance, not records of it.

3. MINING: CONTRACTS WITHOUT OUTPUT

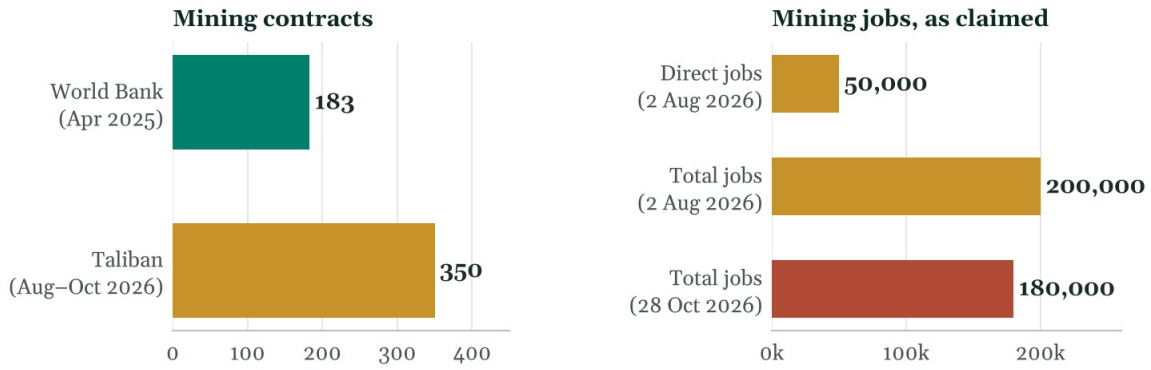
Mining sits at the centre of the Taliban's narrative. Officials describe mineral reserves worth up to $3 trillion as the foundation of future self-sufficiency. Yet the sector's own figures contradict one another.

3.1 Contracts and jobs

In August, the government said 350 mining projects had been tendered or licensed and that the sector employed 200,000 people.[1] On 28 October, the Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Hidayatullah Badri, said nearly 350 contracts were active, 44 of them large-scale, that about 180,000 people worked in mining, and that 1,510 gemstone licences had been issued.[3] The World Bank's April 2025 Afghanistan Development Update recorded 183 mining contracts, including 13 major projects, and noted that many had not yet begun operations.[6,3] Independent research by the Jamestown Foundation found that mining revenue disclosures collapsed in the second half of 2024 and described the sector as run through opaque contracts and patronage networks.[12]

Mining: Claims Versus the Record

Contracts counted by the World Bank and by Kabul; mining employment as stated by Taliban officials



Sources: World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update (April 2025); Government Media and Information Center (2 August 2026); Amu TV (28 October 2026). The World Bank count includes 13 major projects, many not yet operating. The two job totals were issued 12 weeks apart.

The claimed investment of more than AFN 10 billion raises the same problem.[1,13] It is unclear how much has been spent, how much is equipment or construction, how much is merely the stated value of contracts, and how much is earmarked for the future. Without that breakdown, the figure says little about production or revenue.

3.2 Amu Darya oil

In early 2026, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum said 268,989 tonnes of crude oil were extracted from the Amu Darya basin in 2025 and sold to domestic companies for $137,048,053.[14] No record shows where that revenue went. The claim also sits awkwardly with the field's history: in June 2025 the Taliban cancelled the 25-year Amu Darya contract with the Chinese company Afchin, citing repeated

breaches and missed investment commitments.[15] Who has operated the field since, and on what terms, has not been disclosed.

3.3 Mes Aynak: a promise older than the Taliban

Mes Aynak shows that announcements outrunning output is a long-standing pattern, not a Taliban invention. The copper concession was awarded to China's Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) in May 2008 for just under $3 billion, with production expected within five years; in 2013 MCC sought to renegotiate instead.[16] The Taliban and Chinese engineers broke ground again in July 2024. Satellite imagery analysed for Tearline found infrastructure work and preliminary excavation under way, but no copper ore yet extracted.[17] The difference today is that a government with no published budget and limited recognition is presenting the same unrealised projects as evidence of self-sufficiency.

4. INDUSTRY: FACTORIES, PRODUCTS AND JOBS

4.1 Factories

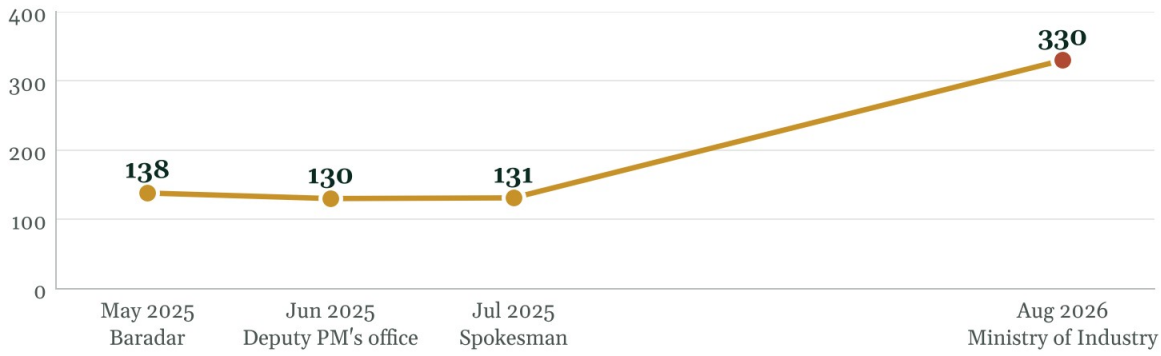
On 15 August 2026, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce told Pajhwok Afghan News that the number of factories had risen from about 3,000 in 2021 to 6,500, employing nearly 450,000 people.[5] The same report quoted the ministry acknowledging that electricity shortages remain the main obstacle for industrialists. Other evidence is more modest. Only 11 of Afghanistan's 34 industrial parks are fully operational, according to the Observer Research Foundation. [7] UNDP's February 2026 private-sector mapping identified limited access to finance, inadequate energy and unpredictable regulation as the main constraints. [18] The World Bank's Enterprise Survey found that Afghan firms finance just 0.28 percent of investment through banks, and that 44 percent cite electricity as a major or severe constraint. [19] Registering a company, building a shed or importing machinery does not make a functioning factory.

4.2 The shifting count of "self-sufficient" products

Official claims about the number of products in which Afghanistan is self-sufficient have moved sharply, and not always upward (Figure 2). In May 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Abdul Ghani Baradar, cited 138 sectors. [20] In June 2025, his office cited full or partial self-sufficiency in 130 items.[4] In July 2025, a deputy government spokesman cited 131.[21] By August 2026, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce cited 330. [5] No product-level data on output, demand or quality accompanies any of these numbers.

The Shifting Count of "Self-Sufficient" Products

Number of products or sectors in which Afghanistan is officially claimed to be self-sufficient



Sources: Pajhwok Afghan News, 27 May 2025, 28 June 2025, 13 July 2025 and 15 August 2026.
No product-level output or demand data accompanies any figure.

4.3 Medicines: self-sufficiency by substitution

Medicines show how the self-sufficiency story is entangled with the conflict with Pakistan. In May 2026, officials said 134 pharmaceutical plants with $450 million in investment met 38 percent of

demand, up from 25 percent eight months earlier. [22] In June 2026, the Ministry of Public Health put the share above 40 percent. [23] In December 2025, a health expert quoted by Pajhwok estimated it at 20–25 percent. [24]

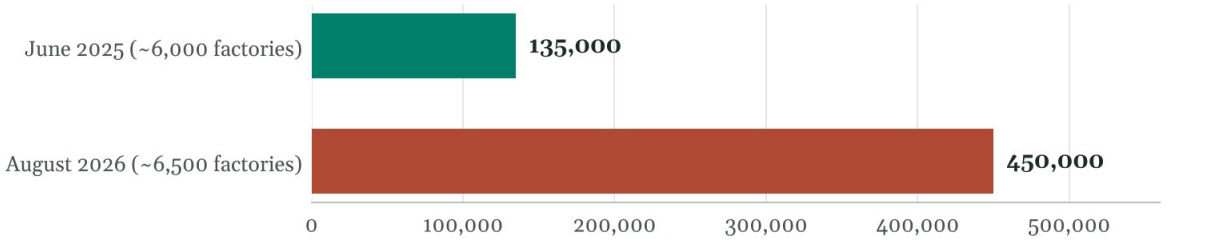
The context matters. In February 2026, the Taliban banned all imports of Pakistani medicines, which had supplied most of the Afghan market; shortages and price rises followed. [11,25] An industry representative told Pajhwok that more than 80 percent of Afghanistan's pharmaceutical needs had previously been met by imports from Pakistan, and that the restrictions had pushed the market towards domestic producers. [5] Some of the rising "domestic share" therefore reflects a closed market rather than new capacity, and patients have paid for it in price and availability.

4.4 Industrial jobs

In June 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister's office said about 135,000 people were directly employed in roughly 6,000 factories. [4] In August 2026, the ministry put industrial employment at about 450,000. [5] A rise of more than threefold in a year, with only about 500 more factories, is implausible on its face, and it is not consistent with UNDP's finding of falling per-capita income and rising hardship. [8]

Industrial Employment: A Threefold Jump in a Year?

Direct industrial jobs and factory numbers, as stated by Taliban authorities



Sources: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs via Pajhwok (28 June 2025); Ministry of Industry and Commerce via Pajhwok (15 August 2026).

5. INVESTMENT, TRADE AND THE BORDER

5.1 $2.389 billion in agreements

The government says 150 MoUs, trade agreements and investment contracts worth $2.389 billion were signed with regional partners. [1,2] Most are memoranda rather than binding contracts: promises, not transfers. To substantiate the figure, five things would be needed: the names of the companies and investors; the value of each project and the investor's country; the legal status and terms of each agreement; the funds actually transferred and when; and the current state of construction, production and employment. None has been published.

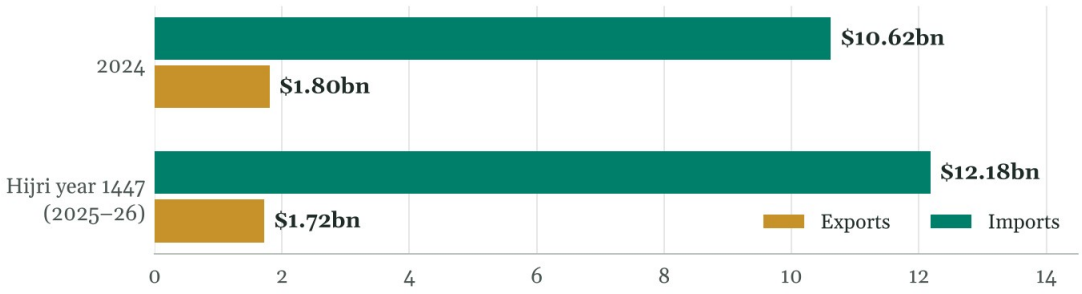
The obstacles to converting such agreements into investment are well documented: a constrained banking system, unreliable power, regulatory uncertainty, shortages of skilled labour and, above all, the absence of broad diplomatic recognition, which leaves investors exposed on payments, insurance, legal protection and sanctions. [18,19]

5.2 A deficit hidden in a headline

The headline trade figure of $13.901 billion conceals the more important number: imports of $12.178 billion against exports of $1.722 billion, a ratio of about seven to one. [2] The pattern is not new: in 2024 the Ministry of Industry and Commerce reported $10.619 billion in imports against $1.803 billion in exports. [26] The World Bank projected Afghanistan's current account deficit at 31.9 percent of GDP in 2025. [27] A rising total trade volume is evidence of import dependence, not of export success.

A Deficit Hidden in a Headline

Afghanistan's exports and imports, US$ billion, as reported by Taliban authorities



Sources: Ministry of Industry and Commerce via Amu TV (January 2025); Government Media and Information Center and Xinhua (2 August 2026). Imports exceeded exports roughly seven to one in 1447.

5.3 The Pakistan border

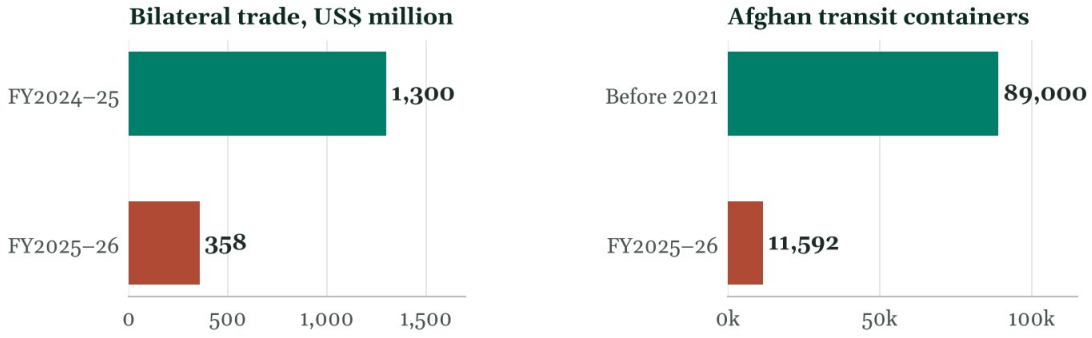
Afghanistan's traditional exports of fresh and dried fruit, vegetables, carpets, coal and minerals moved largely through Pakistan. Pakistan closed its crossings on 12 October 2025 after deadly clashes; Torkham, Chaman–Spin Boldak, Kharlachi, Angoor Adda and Ghulam Khan have remained closed to trade. [10] Bilateral trade fell 74 percent, from $1.3 billion in 2024–25 to $358 million in 2025–26, and

Afghan transit containers through Pakistan fell to 11,592, worth $367 million, from nearly 89,000 worth about $5 billion before 2021.[28,29]

Islamabad's position is explicit: the crossings will reopen when Kabul takes verifiable action against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other groups that Pakistan says attack it from Afghan territory; the Taliban deny harbouring them.[30,31] The costs fall on both sides. A Pakistan Institute of Development Economics study estimated losses of $4.5 billion to Pakistani exporters.[32] For Afghanistan, a landlocked country, the loss of its shortest route to the sea has raised prices and pushed trade towards Iran and other partners.[10,33]

The Cost of a Closed Border

Pakistan–Afghanistan trade and Afghan transit through Pakistan



Sources: Trade Development Authority of Pakistan data reported by Dawn, via KabulNow and DawatMedia24 (October 2026). Crossings closed to trade since 12 October 2025. Transit value fell from about $5 billion to $367 million.

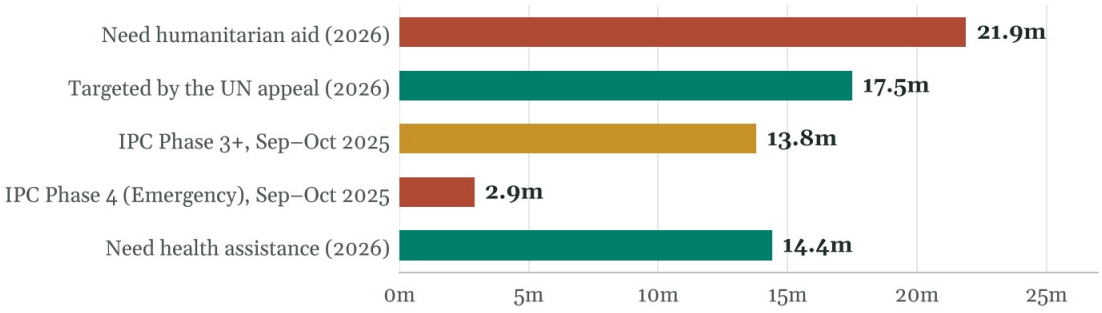
6. AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Agriculture supports most rural Afghans, so its success should be measured by farm incomes, access to water, seed and fertiliser, market prices and, above all, whether families can eat. The government's claims are about inputs: 600 tonnes of improved wheat seed in 12 provinces, 1,001 jeribs of drip-irrigated orchards, 21,400 tonnes of wheat bought from farmers, 3.9 million tonnes of milk a year and 18.6 million saplings planted.[1] No yield, price or income data accompanies them.

The food security data tell a different story. The IPC found 13.8 million people, 28 percent of the population, in Crisis or worse in September–October 2025, including 2.9 million in Emergency, while food assistance reached only 2.7 percent of the population.[34] It projected 17.4 million in Crisis or worse during the 2025–26 lean season, including 4.7 million in Emergency, and about 3.7 million children aged 6–59 months and 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women suffering or likely to suffer acute malnutrition.[34,35] A country cannot be food self-sufficient while a third of its people cannot reliably afford food.

Self-Sufficiency Meets the Humanitarian Ledger

Millions of people, 2025–26



Sources: OCHA, Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026; IPC analysis, September–October 2025; OCHA health cluster data via Amu TV (October 2026). The 2026 appeal of $1.71 billion was about one-third funded by early November 2026.

7. BUDGET, REVENUE AND AID DEPENDENCE

7.1 A state without a published budget

The Taliban say domestic revenue covers their spending. Their only fully disclosed budget was an interim one: AFN 53.9 billion for December 2021 to March 2022, almost entirely for government running costs. [36] Since then, budgets have been reported as approved but their figures have not been published. Revenue data surface mainly through the World Bank, which drew on Ministry of Finance figures to report domestic revenues of AFN 130.2 billion in the first half of the 2025 fiscal year and a fiscal deficit of AFN 18.4 billion (1.4 percent of GDP) in FY2023. [27,37] Reports of salary payments delayed for months point to fiscal strain that the self-sufficiency narrative does not acknowledge.

7.2 Aid still keeps millions alive

The UN's 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan estimates that 21.9 million people, 45 percent of the population, need assistance; it targets 17.5 million at a cost of $1.71 billion. [9] By early November 2026, about a third of that appeal had been funded. [38] UNDP's Afghanistan Socioeconomic Review found that 74 percent of Afghans were unable to meet basic needs in 2025, that more than 80 percent of households were in debt, and that nearly three-quarters relied on negative coping strategies; real GDP grew 1.9 percent, but per-capita income fell 2.1 percent because the population grew faster. [8,39] If domestic revenue were paying for the state and the economy were self-sufficient, it would be hard to explain why nearly half the population still depends on humanitarian aid.

> If the economy were self-sufficient, nearly half the population would not still depend on humanitarian aid.

8. AID DIVERSION: SEPARATING THE ALLEGATIONS

The most sensitive question is whether aid reaches those it is meant for. Four distinct allegations are often run together, and each requires its own evidence: taxes and fees imposed on aid operations; interference in beneficiary lists, hiring and contracts; corruption involving aid personnel; and the diversion of supplies to fighters or armed groups.

Allegation	Evidence	Strength
Taxes and fees on aid	SIGAR's May 2024 audit: 38 of 65 responding United States (US) implementing partners reported paying taxes, fees, duties or utilities to the Taliban, at least $10.9 million [40]	Documented
Interference in lists, hiring and contracts	SIGAR's final report (2025) recorded pressure to add Taliban-selected beneficiaries and employees, and to redirect aid [41]	Documented by interviews
Corruption involving aid personnel	Interviewees alleged UN staff demanded bribes of 5–50 percent of contract values [41]	Alleged
Share of aid reaching recipients	One implementing-partner estimate quoted by SIGAR put it at 30–40 percent [41]	Single estimate
Diversion to armed groups	No public, systematic evidence quantifying diversion to fighters	Unproven

Source: SIGAR 24-22-AR (May 2024); SIGAR final report as reported by Afghanistan International, 14 August 2025. The Taliban rejected SIGAR's findings.

The Taliban have rejected these findings, telling Reuters that aid is used independently and that they work with aid organisations to prevent misuse.[41] The 30–40 percent figure is a single estimate, not an audited measure, and should not be presented as fact. What the evidence does establish is that the aid system is exposed to taxation and interference at several points, and that monitoring and transparency need strengthening.

9. HEALTH AND RETURNEES: THE HUMAN LEDGER

9.1 A health system under strain

An estimated 14.4 million Afghans need health assistance in 2026; humanitarian partners plan to reach 7.2 million. By the end of August, the health sector had received $73 million of the $190.8 million required, about 38 percent. [42] World Health Organization (WHO) figures compiled by Amu TV show that 422 health facilities closed across 30 provinces in 2025 and about 150 more in the first half of 2026, cutting services for more than 3.3 million people. [43] WHO says a mother still dies every hour in Afghanistan from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth. [44]

9.2 Returnees and the labour market

About 2.9 million Afghans returned in 2025, and nearly 5 million since 2023, mostly from Iran and Pakistan. [39] UNDP found that 92 percent of recent returnees could not secure basic necessities, against 74 percent nationally. [39] In provinces with the most returnees, only 3 percent of people have formal jobs and 78 percent depend on daily labour. [45] Women's labour force participation stands at 5.1 percent. [46] These are the conditions in which claims of hundreds of thousands of new jobs must be judged.

10. CLAIMS VERSUS EVIDENCE

Sector	Taliban claim	Independent evidence	Assessment
Mining contracts	350 projects; AFN 10 billion+ invested	World Bank: 183 contracts, many not operating	Output and investment unverified
Mining jobs	200,000 (Aug) then 180,000 (Oct 2026)	No company-level employment records	Unverified; inconsistent
Mineral wealth	Up to $3 trillion	Estimates of potential reserves, not income	Not current wealth
Factories	6,500 factories	11 of 34 industrial parks operational	Number of producing factories unclear
Self-sufficiency	330 products	Official counts of 130–138 in 2025	Product-level data missing
Medicines	Over 40% of demand met	Official 38%; expert 20–25%; import ban since Feb 2026	Partly forced substitution
Investment	150 agreements, $2.389 billion	No investor, terms or transfer data	Transfers unverified
Trade	$13.901 billion total trade	Imports $12.178bn vs exports $1.722bn	Large structural deficit
Agriculture	More seed, milk and orchards	13.8m in IPC Phase 3+; aid reaches 2.7%	Production claims ≠ food access
Budget	Spending covered by revenue	No full budget since 2022; AFN 18.4bn deficit FY2023	Opaque
Aid need	Moving to self-sufficiency	21.9m in need; 74% cannot meet basic needs	Needs remain vast
Health	Facilities improving	570+ facilities closed or suspended since 2025	System under severe strain
Employment	Hundreds of thousands of jobs	Women's participation 5.1%; returnees 3% formal jobs	Job quality and access poor
Aid	Aid reaches beneficiaries	Taxes, fees and interference documented by SIGAR	Diversion risks real; scale disputed

Source: SAT compilation from the sources cited in Sections 2–9.

10.1 What to watch

Indicator	Why it matters	Horizon
Publication of a full 1405 budget, with revenue and expenditure lines	The single clearest test of the self-sufficiency claim	Months
A public mining contract registry, or first copper output from Mes Aynak	Would show whether contracts are turning into production and revenue	Months to years
Reopening of Torkham and Chaman against security benchmarks	Would test how much of Afghan "self-sufficiency" depended on the closure	Weeks to months
Medicine prices and availability if Pakistani imports resume	Distinguishes real pharmaceutical capacity from forced substitution	Months
IPC and UNDP data for 2026–27	Shows whether claimed gains reach households	Months
Humanitarian funding levels and further clinic closures	Measures dependence on external support	Weeks to months

11. IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

The gap between claim and reality in Kabul matters to Pakistan for three reasons. First, Pakistan′s border policy is now one of the strongest forces acting on the Afghan economy, so Afghan economic claims are partly claims about the effects of Pakistani policy. Second, an economy that cannot employ its returnees or feed its people is a source of instability on Pakistan′s western frontier. Third, the self-sufficiency narrative is also a diplomatic instrument: it is used to court investors and to argue that Kabul can do without its neighbours, at the same time as Afghan trade shifts towards Iran and beyond. [10,33]

Pakistan′s security case for conditional reopening is grounded in the continuing threat from the TTP, and Islamabad has said it will restore trade and transit once Kabul takes verifiable action. [30] The task now is to turn that position into a strategy that protects Pakistani security, recovers Pakistani commercial losses and shows Afghans that the obstacle is militancy, not Pakistan.

1. **Make security conditionality measurable.** Publish clear, verifiable benchmarks for a phased reopening of Torkham and Chaman, ideally checked through a mechanism facilitated by a mutually acceptable third party such as Qatar, Türkiye or China, as analysts have proposed.[33] This keeps the pressure on the TTP question while putting the burden of delay squarely on Kabul.
2. **Open a monitored humanitarian and medicines lane.** A narrowly defined, inspected corridor for food and medicines would ease civilian hardship, restore a market for Pakistani pharmaceutical and food exporters, and undercut the narrative that Pakistan is punishing ordinary Afghans.
3. **Compete to win back transit.** Prepare a transit package for Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar, with predictable fees, faster clearance and digitised documentation, so that Afghan trade returns to its shortest route once security conditions are met.
4. **Build independent economic monitoring of Afghanistan.** Fund a standing Pakistani monitor, drawing on think tanks such as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, that tracks Afghan trade, prices, mining and revenue from verifiable sources. Policy, diplomacy and public communication should rest on data, not on Kabul′s announcements.
5. **Manage returns in step with absorption capacity.** Coordinate with the UN Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration so that returns are orderly and dignified, given UNDP′s finding that 92 percent of recent returnees cannot meet basic needs. [39]
6. **Lead on transparency in regional forums.** Press, with China, Central Asian states and Gulf partners, for disclosure of mining contracts and revenues as a condition of regional connectivity projects. Transparency serves Pakistan′s interest in a stable, solvent neighbour.

12. CONCLUSION

On one side stand the Taliban's claims of record progress; on the other, a population of which three in four cannot meet basic needs, nearly half depends on humanitarian assistance, and millions have lost access to health care. Reports from the World Bank, the UN agencies and independent researchers show that Afghanistan's crisis is not only one of resources, but of jobs, household income, debt and access to basic services. Some activity is real, but there is little sign that it has reached ordinary citizens.

The mineral wealth is real too, but it becomes national prosperity only when extraction, sales and revenue are transparent. The same holds for factories: a building is not a production line, and a registered company is not a job. The allegations around aid require similar care: taxes, interference, corruption and diversion are different problems needing different evidence, and the most serious of them remain unproven. What is certain is that monitoring must improve.

The core question is not what the Taliban say about their performance, but what has changed in Afghan lives. Until budgets, contracts and revenues are published, the self-sufficiency narrative will remain a claim, not a record. For Pakistan, the lesson is to insist on evidence, keep security at the centre of its Afghan policy, and offer Afghans a reconnection that rewards verifiable action against militancy.

> True self-sufficiency begins when the benefits of national resources reach the ordinary citizen and the state's accounts are open to inspection.

ENDNOTES

Sources are listed in order of first citation. Official Taliban figures are attributed as claims of the issuing authority.

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