

Summary Report
Visit to the Republic of Tajikistan
16th – 21st September 2019



By

The Lord Sheikh

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1. Introduction / Mission

His Excellency Mr Masud Khalifazoda, on behalf of the Tajikistan government, expressed interest in increasing cooperation between the United Kingdom and Tajikistan. This cooperation is especially concentrated in the areas of education, trade, tourism and business development. Recommendations to improve the business climate and create favourable conditions for attracting British and other foreign investors were voiced at meetings in the United Kingdom and in Tajikistan with representatives of the economic bloc and the Tajik Parliament. Furthermore, there were positive endorsements for linkages with Tajik institutions of higher education and the University of Plymouth and the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom.

His Excellency Mr Masud Khalifazoda invited me to visit Tajikistan.

My visit took place on 16th to 21st September 2019. It was a joint project with the Tajik and British Embassies organising my meetings.

I have prepared this report subsequent to my visit.

Prior to the visit, I had meetings with His Excellency Mr Masud Khalifazoda, Mr Chris Williamson, Desk Officer for Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Dr John Kennedy, Global Strategy Directorate at the Department for International Trade, Mr Atam Sandhu, Joint-Chief Executive Officer of Developing Markets Associates, Professor Simon Payne, the Deputy Vice Chancellor for International and Planning of the University of Plymouth, Mr John Quirk the Director of Global Engagement at the University of Nottingham and telephone conversations with His Excellency Mr Matthew Lawson the British Ambassador to Tajikistan.

The purpose of my visit was to find out more about the current situation in Tajikistan and to strengthen political, trade, educational and cultural ties between the United Kingdom and Tajikistan. It was primarily a fact-finding mission. I had the intention of observing and exploring the social and economic factors in the country. I wanted to meet and talk to people, ascertain the situation and make representations to government departments.

This report comprises of a summary of the people I met, the things I saw, and the information gathered from my various meetings and engagements.

I hope that this report will help to inform the relevant people of the current social, political and economic climate in Tajikistan. I believe it is important that the United Kingdom bases its approach to and engagement with Tajikistan on evidence gathered from within the country.

My report concludes with a number of recommendations which should be looked into.

2. Itinerary of Main Engagements

Monday 16th September 2019

- Briefing lunch with His Excellency Matthew Lawson the British Ambassador to Tajikistan and Peter Fernandes Cardy, Head of DFID.
- Meeting with Mr Muzaffar M Huseinzoda, Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Meeting with Aga Khan Development Network's Representative in Tajikistan, Mr Qozidavlat Qoimdodov
- Meeting with Mr Nematullo Hikmatullozoda, Minister of Economic Development and Trade and Deputy Minister Mr Tojiddin Jurrazoda
- Reception with GCRF COMPASS participants

Tuesday 17th September 2019

- Participation at Fire Aid project completion event at Ministry of Interior
- Speech given at GCRF COMPASS Conference
- Dinner at Hilton Hotel with DFID Team and Private Sector Partners

Wednesday 18th September 2019

- Meeting at Ministry of Education and Science with the Deputy Minister Mr Rahmatullo Madayubovich Mirboboev
- Meeting at State Committee on Investment and Property Management with Ms Nigina Anvari, the Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Investments and State Property Management
- Meeting with Mr Numon Abdughafforzoda, the Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development
- Meeting with Mr Abdullo Kurbanov, CEO and Co-Founder of Alif
- Meeting with Dr Akramsho Felaliev, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament
- Dinner with Ambassadors hosted by His Excellency Matthew Lawson

Thursday 19th September 2019

- Visit to Khujand city, Sughd Region
- Meeting with Governor of Sughd Region Mr Rajaboy Ahmadzoda
- Visit to Free Economic Zone
- Tour in Khujand
- Dinner with Young Entrepreneurs in Sughd Region

Friday 20th September 2019

- Visit to Bobojon Gafurov District
- Visit to DFID funded UNICEF projects
- Visit to Asht District to see Opening Ceremony of Innovation Lab
- Lunch with UNICEF project implementers team in Asht

3. Brief Overview of the History of Tajikistan

Summary

Tajikistan has a rich history which goes back to prehistoric times. Although not formally a state until the Soviet Union's decree in 1924, Tajikistan's indigenous people have a long heritage and ancient cultural roots, and there are echoes of the past in Tajik culture today.

As a former part of the ancient Persian Empire, the Tajik language is very similar to Persian. Furthermore, it is claimed that the name 'Tajikistan' is formed from Persian words: 'Tajik' is formed of 'taj' meaning 'crown' and 'ik' meaning 'head'. 'Tajik' therefore means 'person who wears a crown' and 'isetan' is an old Persian word for 'place of'. Together, Tajikistan in Persian is 'place of the Tajiks' and so Tajik citizens are people of a noble origin.

Much of Tajikistan's history and development closely resemble that of Uzbekistan as both the Tajiks and Uzbeks were settled in Central Asia. As a result, for centuries, Tajikistan was part of the ancient Silk Road where different cultures, traditions and ideas converged. It was a region of science, culture and learning for several centuries.

Early History

The ancient sites of nomadic hunters have been discovered in the mountains of Tajikistan. They date back to between the 10th and 7th millennia BC. These sites, along with Stone Age rock drawings, show that Tajik ancestors hunted, bred cattle and were agricultural.

In 1,000 BC, there were slaveholding sites called Bactria and Sogd and the mountain region became the battle ground for numerous invasions for many centuries.

The slaveholding sites were conquered by the Persian Tsar, Cyrus, and became part of the Ahemenid Empire in the 6th century BC. Two centuries later, Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian Empire. Then, in the 2nd Century BC, after the Greeks invaded, local tribes gained independence and the mountain region began to be called Tokharistan. Tokharistan joined the Kushan Empire in the 4th Century and enjoyed the development that came with being part of the realm in Central Asia. Rapid development occurred in areas of culture, the economy and trade relations. In fact, it was through Tokharistan that the Silk Road took goods from China and India to the West.

Vast change occurred in the late 7th Century when the Arabs invaded Central Asia and settled, introducing Islam to the region.

Golden Age

The 8th and 9th Centuries are generally regarded as a 'golden age' of culture and learning in Central Asia under the Arabian caliphate.

Then came the Persian Samanid dynasty. This epoch allowed crafts, trades, science, literature and arts to prosper. It was during this era that the Tajik language was developed in full. The Samanid dynasty created an alliance with the caliph of Baghdad and developed Bukhara as a centre of Muslim culture.

Middle Ages

In the 13th Century, under Genghis Khan, the region of Tajikistan became part of the Mongolian Empire. During this time, increasing numbers of nomadic Turks migrated from the northern steppe areas.

Between the 14th and 15th Centuries, Tajikistan is part of the Turkic ruler Tamerlane's Empire. Amir Timur was a tribal prince and created a vast empire with Samarqand as its capital. He was one of the greatest generals the world has ever known and was held supreme across both Asia and Europe. He accomplished many impossible tasks through his indomitable will, matchless military skill and exceptional courage. He also turned Samarqand into an outstandingly beautiful city. Under Emperor Timur, literature, art and science, particularly astronomy, flourished. However, the political stability he established disintegrated after his death.

Between the 16th Century and 1868, the region of Tajikistan has many territorial disputes and different areas belonged to different khanates and states.

Soviet Rule

In the 1880's, Central Asia was conquered by Russia. In 1868, Tajikistan was divided. The north of Tajikistan was annexed to the Russian Empire and the south annexed to the Emirate of Bukhara and the Turkestan General Governorate was established.

After socialist revolution in Russia in 1917, armed Central Asian groups attempt to exploit the Bolshevik revolution but ultimately fail.

In 1921, Northern Tajikistan becomes part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Sociality Republic (ASSR) which included Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, northern Turkmenistan and southern Kazakhstan and, in 1924, a Tajik ASSR was established as a state sub-division of the Uzbek SSR.

In 1929, Tajikistan becomes a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and acquired the territory of Khujand.

Being first part of the Tajik ASSR and then the Tajik SSR paved the way for the creation of national institutions in Tajikistan such as the first Tajik-language newspaper which was established in 1926 and new educational institutions were opened. The central government also trained a small number of Tajiks for public office.

Although often referred to as the poorest SSR, Tajikistan was designated as a cotton-growing republic and experienced some economic progress.

Independence

Tajikistan became independent in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Soon after, Tajikistan plunged into civil war from 1992 to 1997 which led to thousands of deaths, displaced around 600,000 people and devastated the economy.

In the present day, Tajikistan is a thriving independent democratic state, a full member of the United Nations and recognised as a state by 117 countries.

President Emomali Rahmon

His Excellency Emomali Rahmon, became Head of Government in 1992 and in 1994 was elected to the newly created position of President of the Republic of Tajikistan. Following independence and the civil war, it must be appreciated that President Rahmon has worked diligently to shape a prosperous and progressive country from the legacy of the Soviet Union. There have been challenges such as a weak economy, drug trafficking and social issues. However, His Excellency the President is totally committed to promoting the good stories of Tajikistan in the international arena and making positive changes to improve the lives of Tajik citizens.

4. United Kingdom Government Policy in Tajikistan and Work of DFID

Initial discussions with the United Kingdom's Ambassador in Tajikistan and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

Before my visit to Tajikistan, I had fruitful discussions with the FCO and on my arrival in Dushanbe, I had an initial briefing meeting with His Excellent Matthew Lawson.

A brief overview of the United Kingdom's top policy goals are as follows:

- A Tajikistan that contributes to regional stability through constructive engagement over Afghanistan and supports a rules-based international system.
- Reduced threat to the United Kingdom from narcotics trafficking and organised crime.
- A significantly improved and transparent business and investment climate with increased United Kingdom-business activity. More widespread economic development.
- A Tajikistan that is more democratic and fully respects the rule of law and its international human rights obligations.

Department for International Development (DFID) Support

Alongside my discussions with Ambassador Lawson, I also spoke to Mr Peter Fernandes Cardy who was the Head of DFID Central Asia. The DFID Central Asia office is based in Dushanbe and the meeting allowed me to not only get to grips with DFID policy in both Tajikistan and Central Asia but to see real change happening from the central office and on the ground.

There are a number of DFID projects being undertaken in Tajikistan. The budgets for these projects range from £3 million to £25 million.

There are two projects for economic development which operate in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. They are the *Enterprise and Innovation Programme* (EIP) and the *Policy and Innovation Facility* (PIF) which both began in 2018 and are due to be completed by 2022. The EIP has a budget of £20 million and aims to facilitate the growth of enterprises ranging from micro, small and medium sized to start-ups. These enterprises are stimulated by business incubators and the encouragement of entrepreneurship, innovation and job creation. The PIF has a budget of £5 million and intends to strengthen economic development by transforming political economic aspirations and goals into practical, achievable and realistic policies.

In relation to governance and security, DFID have two projects: *Support to Public Finance Management* in Tajikistan and *Effective Governance for Economic Development* in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The *Public Finance Management* programme has run from 2015 and is projected to finish in 2021 with a budget of £11.8 million. The programme aims to increase effectiveness, efficiency and accountability for public finance management policies. This includes a more transparent government budget that is responsive and accountable to citizens. Upon approval, the *Effective Governance* project would run from 2020 to 2025 with a budget of £25 million to improve effectiveness, accountability and transparency of economic development policy delivery in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

(SEE (3) OF ADDITIONAL POINTS TO NOTE)

Visit to Bobojon Gafurov District to see DFID funded UNICEF projects

There are three projects that DFID Central Asia are leading through the *Conflict Security and Stability Fund*. The fund has the objective of strengthening stability and reducing conflict. The main partners for implementing the CSSF projects are the International Organisation for Migration, Aga Khan Foundation, and UNICEF. The projects began in 2016 and each have budgets of between £3 million and £4 million.

The *Tajik-Afghan Integration, Resilience and Reform Building Project* has the objective of reducing community and cross-border conflict over access to irrigation, drinking water, pasture resources and trade. The *Improving Communities' Stability through Inclusive Resource Management Project* aims to improve integration and make communities more resilient and less prone to crime and violence. The third CSSF project focuses on increasing resilience of youth for peaceful and inclusive communities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The Bobojon Gafurov District in the northern part of Sughd province and its capital is Ghafurov which is a town in the south. 95 percent of the district is classed as rural and has a population of around 340,000 over an area of 2,700km².

Visit to Asht District to see Opening Ceremony of Innovation Lab

The Asht District is in the northernmost area of Sughd Province and borders Uzbekistan on the north, east and west. The capital of the province is Shaydon.

I participated in the official opening ceremony of the 14th UNICEF Adolescent Innovation Lab in Asht. Following this, I had lunch with the Asht UNICEF project implementers team.

The programme has supported the establishment of six innovation labs which will help young people to build their skills and make them more resilient. The labs are distributed across four districts in northern Tajikistan and will reach 2,400 young people every year.

Furthermore, the PESHSAF (UPSHIFT) programme has expanded to other parts of Tajikistan and these innovation labs provide necessary skills and opportunity for thousands of marginalised youth to build social entrepreneurship skills for community development.

Opportunities for young people in Tajikistan

UNICEF implements a CSSF project to improve adolescent participation in local governance in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Focusing on adolescents and youths, the project promotes participatory governance at local level which works to increase the resilience of youth for peaceful and inclusive communities. Local governance groups collaborate on finding issues of concern to young people by establishing Youth Consultative Councils where young people meet to discuss issues in their communities and propose solutions to the local government. This serves to amplify the voices of adolescents and youth and connect their needs to policy-making processes on community and local government level.

I had a dinner with the Young Entrepreneurs in Sughd Region and engaged in informative and fruitful discussions. The young people had come from all walks of life and professions and I was very impressed by their determination to succeed. I made the point that they should think about working in Tajikistan and help to build the country. I also expressed concern about the number of people from Tajikistan who go abroad, and that they are indeed a loss to the country.

5. Visit to Khujand City in Sughd Region

The Sughd Region is one of the four administrative divisions of Tajikistan and one of its three provinces. The region is centred in the historical Sogdiana and is in the northwest of Tajikistan with an area of 25,400km² and a population of over two million. The region shares a border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and is home to many ethnic Uzbeks. There are geographical issues with the region being separated from the rest of Tajikistan by the Gissar Range as many passes are closed in winter. In the north of the region is the arable Fergana Valley province which holds 30 percent of Tajikistan's population and produces two thirds of Tajikistan's GDP.

Khujand City, formerly Leninabad, is the capital of Sughd region. It is the second largest city in Tajikistan and is one of the oldest cities dating back to around 2,500 years ago. It is situated on the Syr Darya at the mouth of the Fergana Valley and was a major city along the ancient Silk Road. It is close to both the Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan borders.

6. Visit to Free Economic Zone in Sughd Region

The Free Economic Zone (FEZ) was established in 2008 and located in the southwest area of Khujand. It has a total area of 320 hectares and is at a favourable location due to the proximity of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz borders.

The Zone offers a number of incentives for enterprises such as: foreign and domestic investment capital; technologies and managerial experience; modern and social infrastructure; employment; new jobs; saturate the internal market with products and consumer goods; production facilities and; improve standards of living in Tajikistan. There must be a minimum investment of US\$500,000 to operate in the FEZ.

During my meeting with the representatives of the Sughd FEZ, the head of the Sughd FEZ, Mr Firdavs Olimzoda, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the opportunities the Sughd FEZ offers to enterprises.

(SEE RECOMMENDATION 22)

7. Relationship between Tajikistan and Other Countries

Tajikistan is a landlocked country with a topography made up of 93 percent mountains. Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Tajikistan's main political and trading partner is Russia; however, the Tajik government is vigorously participating in improving regional ties. The government is actively engaged with Uzbekistan to progress political, trade and investment links. In addition, it is encouraging trade with Afghanistan and seeks to increase trade with Iran with better rail links across Afghanistan. There were also discussions held in Dushanbe between Iran's President Rouhani and President Rahmon which culminated in the reestablishment of direct air links. Tajikistan has also sought to grow cooperation with China with joint military exercises in the Pamir Mountains and engaged with the Kyrgyz Republic in an attempt to resolve the border dispute and reduce fighting between local people on either side.

There is also cooperation between Tajikistan and countries including China, Russia and Afghanistan to reduce the presence of Islamic militants in the border areas of Tajikistan.

In order to gain insight into Tajikistan's external relations with other countries, and Tajikistan's views on improving diplomatic and political relations with the United Kingdom, I had a meeting with Mr Muzaffar Huseinzoda, Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr Huseinzoda named the United Kingdom as a reliable partner with whom Tajikistan would like to strengthen political dialogue and economic relations.

Mr Huseinzoda agreed that security and stability are the key priorities for the country and that Afghanistan remains a major threat to the security of the country and entire region. Moreover, peace in Afghanistan could open up new opportunities in the development of trade and economic relations between all countries in Central Asia, and particularly for Tajikistan. Furthermore, the *One Belt One Road* initiative, the *CASSA 1000* and *Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Railway* projects could contribute in supporting peace initiatives in Afghanistan.

Both myself and Mr Huseinzoda agreed that religious radicalisation amongst youth in Tajikistan could be prevented through providing better education, more access to jobs and more opportunities in setting up private business. The contribution of the United Kingdom regarding entrepreneurship is important as Tajik youths are already engaged through various DFID's projects on improving business and economy of the country.

Mr Huseinzoda supported the initiative of signing a cooperation agreement between the United Kingdom Border Force and the Tajik Custom Service, noting that this is in line with the interests of the country and that it is one of the fields where Tajikistan seeks support from the United Kingdom.

I welcomed the efforts of the Tajik and Uzbek leaders in bringing their countries closer through friendly and constructive dialogue. This dialogue has opened new opportunities in trade and, for example, has eliminated obstacles in the construction of *Roghun HPP*. I agreed that although the plant is a very costly and burdensome project for the country, at its conclusion Tajikistan would gain internal energy independence, as well as the opportunity to export green and renewable energy to neighbouring countries including Afghanistan and Pakistan.

(SEE (2) OF ADDITIONAL POINTS TO NOTE)

8. Tajikistan Parliament

General overview

Tajikistan is a republic and has three branches of government; the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch and the Judicial Branch.

The Executive Branch is dominated by the President, His Excellency, Mr Emomali Rahmon. The President serves as the head of government, otherwise known as the Council of Ministers, and as Chairman of Parliament (Supreme Assembly or Majlisi Oli). The President's tenure began in 1994 and Tajikistan voted in 2016 to lift term limits for the President. The government has also passed legislation to allow the President and his family immunity against prosecution for life and assigned him the Father of the Nation. There are Presidential elections scheduled for 2020. **(SEE RECOMMENDATION 17)**

The President appoints the Prime Minister and all members of the Council of Ministers with the approval of the legislature.

The Legislative Branch is made up of the bicameral Supreme Assembly (Majlisi Oli). This includes the Assembly of Representatives (Majlisi Namoyandagon) which has 63 seats and meets throughout the year, and National Assembly (Majlisi Milli), which has 33 seat and meets at least twice per year. There are Parliamentary elections also scheduled for 2020. **(SEE RECOMMENDATION 17)**

The Judicial Branch's Supreme Court is the highest court in Tajikistan and the existence of an independent judiciary is written into the constitution. There are other high courts including the Supreme Economic Court and the Constitutional Court and the President appoints the judges of the courts with the approval of the legislature. There is a Military Court also. All judges in the courts have 10-year terms.

Meeting with the Deputy Speaker of Parliament

I met with Dr Akramsho Felaliev, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament to discuss strengthening political relations between the Tajik Parliament and the British Parliament.

One of my proposals to Dr Felaliev was to build Parliamentary ties through the engagement of All-Party Parliamentary Groups in both countries. I am a Vice-Chair of the British-Tajikistan All-Party Parliamentary Group in the British Parliament. **(SEE RECOMMENDATION 14)**

Dr Felaliev thanked me for this initiative to boost cooperation between two countries. He expressed the Tajik Parliament's willingness to participate in a joint venture.

Dr Felaliev also referred to Tajikistan's "open door" policy and welcomed the initiative of a connection with Tajik and British Universities, and assured to endorse it through the Parliament, if needed.

(SEE RECOMMENDATION 12)

9. Trade and Investment

Tajikistan has faced many challenges and remains one of the poorest countries in Central Asia. In order to fully understand the situation in Tajikistan regarding trade and investment in Tajikistan, I had meetings with Mr Nematullo Hikmatullozoda, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Deputy Minister Mr Tojiddin Jurrazoda and Ms Nigina Anvari, the Deputy Chair of the State Committee on Investments and State Property Management.

Meeting with the Minister of Economy and Trade

The Minister of Economy and Trade, Mr Nematullo Hikmatullozoda, gave a long report on the role of the Leader of Nation in peace building, Tajikistan's economic indicators and achievements for the period of last 27 years.

Mr Hikmatullozoda stressed the role of DFID and thanked them for their considerable support over the years. He was clear in indicating that the government would ask DFID to support the implementation of Tajikistan's *National Development Strategy* until 2030 and to participate more actively in its short-term programs.

Mr Hikmatullozoda also mentioned some sectors where Tajiks want to see the United Kingdom's expertise including: technological chain of processing agricultural products from collection, logistic, storage, processing and packaging; energy; mining; and (for DFID) support with drafting conception on Digital Economy.

I listed the existing challenges that affect Tajikistan's investment attractiveness to British investors including: high tax burden, frequent inspections and corruption. I also informed the Minister about the plan to hold a Tajikistan Trade Conference in London next year jointly with the Tajik Embassy to the United Kingdom which was enthusiastically welcomed by the Minister. The Minister assured that he would make every effort to support the conference and noted the trade, investment and energy sectors as priorities for the country.

Meeting with the State Committee on Investment and State Property Management

Mrs Nigina Anvari, the Deputy Chair of the State Committee on Investments and State Property Management, stated her appreciation for the United Kingdom's support through DFID. Tajikistan has benefitted from the support the United Kingdom has given since independence.

The United Kingdom's contribution to *CASA 1000* and the upcoming *EIP* and *PIF* projects were highlighted.

Mrs Anvari noted that Tajikistan is keen to learn from the United Kingdom's experience in boosting its economy through supporting small and medium business. She spoke about Tajikistan's investment potential in energy, mining, agriculture, food, labour and human potential. However, she expressed concern about the decline in the turnover and business investment from the United Kingdom to Tajikistan.

Mrs Anvari assured me of the Committee's support for the Tajikistan Trade Conference and its holding at the highest level.

She also informed me that they have submitted their proposal to DFID for support of the project, *Digital Mapping of Investment Opportunities of Tajikistan*.

I noted the need for the Tajik government to reform the economy and eliminate challenges that have a negative impact on the growth of private small and medium-sized businesses and influence on investment attractiveness of the country. I welcomed Mrs Anvari's reply that Tajik government realise the challenges and are currently working on revising the tax code and reforming the finance and banking sector.

Economic Development

Tajikistan's recent economic development has been stable. In January to April of 2019, Tajikistan's GDP expanded 7.3 percent year on year which is well ahead of the yearly expectation. In 2016, Tajikistan's GDP was US \$6.9 billion and at the end of 2019, is expected to reach US \$7.6 billion.

As referred to previously, Tajikistan is the main focus of *UK Development Assistance* (through DFID) in Central Asia. The attention placed on developing areas such as hydropower, enterprise development and agriculture emphasise the opportunities in, and importance of, economic stability and development in the region.

Bilateral Trade and Investment

Tajikistan is rated as 126th out of 190 in the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business Index*. Tajikistan's natural resources include: hydropower, some petroleum, uranium, mercury, brown coal, lead, zinc, antimony, tungsten, silver, gold, aluminium and cement. The exact statistics for import and exports between the United Kingdom and Tajikistan are unknown but the major import products from the United Kingdom are mineral oil and equipment.

The key drivers of the Tajik economy are aluminium, cotton, remittances and projects.

It should be noted that the volume of exports has fallen in recent years. The aluminium export has reduced year on year, falling steeply in 2018 and cotton has been down almost 17 percent since the beginning of 2019.

Remittances can be sourced mainly from Russia and represent over 30 percent of Tajikistan's GDP and are a driver of both FX earnings and household consumption. Tajikistan is the most remittance-dependent country in the world due to the large number of migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan. The value of remittances has been marginally falling since 2017 as remittances are vulnerable to political and economic factors.

The spending on projects in Tajikistan represent a large percent of the budget and will remain so for several more years until major electricity projects, such as Rogun, are completed and Tajikistan can export the electricity produced.

Deficit is close to 3 percent of GDP. As a result of the declination of the value of cotton exports falling by 18 percent and aluminium exports by 19 percent and the cost of machinery and equipment rising by 20 percent, Tajikistan ran a trade deficit of US \$1 billion with US \$570 million of exports and US \$1,567 million of imports.

In order to stabilise the economy, the government is set to borrow up to US \$750 million of new loans to stabilise the economy. These new loans will be used for initiatives including funding the budget deficit, sustain power project work and repair power plant infrastructure. In June 2019, the government held a conference for donors in Dushanbe which was planned to attract US \$400 million of loan and grant aid.

(SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 4, 5, 6 AND 7)

Currency

The priority for the National Bank of Tajikistan is to maintain stability. The Somoni exchange rate in 2018 was devalued by 6.9 percent against the US dollar. Whilst trying to prevent a spike in inflation, the National Bank is looking to attract investment into electricity and extractive industries. As Tajikistan exports commodities such as aluminium and cotton, it is less worried about competitive pricing on international markets.

Whilst inflation has risen recently as a consequence of the dropping value of exports, it is due to ease by the end of 2019 as a result of there being greater availability of locally produced and cheaper food. Annually, inflation in Tajikistan is likely to float around 6 percent for several years.

In addition to Somoni, US Dollars are frequently used in shops, hotels and for other transactions in the country.

(SEE RECOMMENDATION 9)

Projects

Barki Tochik OAHK is the state-owned national energy company is reported to have around US \$2.4 billion of debt and is projected to increase the debt by US \$1.2 billion by 2025 to upgrade and expand the network whilst also paying independent suppliers the country owes money to for their supply of power. The Energy Minister has announced the government plans to raise a loan of US \$130 million from the World Bank to pay back the debts.

Rogun HPP is a hydropower plant which the electricity generated will become a major source of export earnings. The building of the plant is causing a strain on Tajikistan's budget: the government spent 14 percent of its budget on construction last year, and only one of the six planned turbines is in operation so far.

CASA-1000 is a power network programme that has the aim of providing 1,300 MW of electricity to villages in the Central Asian region to countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan from plants in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. The World Bank said it will deliver an extra US \$24 million to ensure this programme delivers and over 1,200 km of power transmission lines will be built. This project relies on Tajikistan's capacity and the completion of the Rogun dam.

Gold production in Tajikistan rose 50.14 percent year on year and silver production gained 32.5 percent year on year in the first half of 2019. In 2018, Tajikistan produced 6.4 tonnes of gold. The main mine is *Zeravshan*, of which 75 percent is owned by China's Zijin Mining. The Tajikistan government has identified three new deposits for development: Taror, Chore and Porkud. Furthermore, the *Tibet-Everest Resource* company is set to invest \$40 million in the building of a plant to process metals for export to the Chinese market.

The Tajikistan Department of Geology has claimed that there are two million tonnes of oil and three billion cubic metres of gas in 20 fields across Tajikistan. The government are in the process of attracting investors and have entered into contracts with over 20 companies. Furthermore, the *Central Asia Gas Line D* construction has begun in Tajikistan which will take gas from Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan to China and will be a source of annual income.

Tajikistan is a part of China's 'One Belt One Road' project.

Tajikistan is also receiving aid for projects such as the *Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project* which is receiving a US \$58 million grant from the World Bank. The EU is providing EUR10 million for water management and irrigation systems in the Zarafshon river basin and the Eurasian Development Bank has approved a US \$40 million loan to go towards the *Nurek Hydropower Plant Rehabilitation Project* which supplies approximately 70 percent of the country's electricity at only 85 percent capacity.

Banking: meeting with Mr Abdullo Kurbanov the CEO and Co-Founder of Alif

I had made presentations to His Excellency Masud Khalifazoda about the development of Islamic finance in Tajikistan. I am the Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamic Finance in the British Parliament. It is a robust body and enjoys support from the major political parties and has over 100 stakeholders. The stakeholders are from different sectors of Islamic finance industry and we could seek their involvement in the development of the Islamic finance sector in Tajikistan.

I was of the opinion that Tajikistan can look into developing and promoting Islamic finance activities and felt that there could be a demand for these products.

I discussed the various issues with Mr Mr Abdullo Kurbanov and showed him the presentations on the subject.

(SEE RECOMMENDATION 8)

10. Tourism in Tajikistan

To appreciate the extent of opportunity Tajikistan has in the tourism sector, I met with Mr Numon Abdughafforzoda, the Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development.

Mr Abdughafforzoda gave a briefing on the activities that the Committee are undertaking to develop the tourism industry. The Committee has been vigorous in its efforts after the announcement of the *2019-2021 Years of Tourism, Handicraft and Rural Development* by the President.

Mr Abdughafforzoda mentioned that a tax-free policy for newly established tourism companies has meant that the number of tourism companies has increased from around 70 to 190. In addition, the E-Visa system, in combination with the non-registration visit for 45 days, led to an increased number of entries into Tajikistan to around one million people (up to a three percent rise).

During my visit, I did in fact talk to two groups of tourists who were visiting Tajikistan to get their feedback and I was pleased to hear that tourists were satisfied with the arrangement.

I however felt that more can be done to promote tourism which could include:

- 1) Abolishing the need for visas for tourists coming into Tajikistan;
- 2) The provision of good hotels and transport facilities;
- 3) The promotion of two-centre tourism which could be for Tajikistan and surrounding countries like Uzbekistan;
- 4) Arranging for travel agents from the United Kingdom to visit Tajikistan which would help the travel agents to learn more about Tajikistan and it would be a good marketing strategy;
- 5) Advertising tourism in the United Kingdom in the media and on public transport as well as hoardings. In addition, efforts should be made for programmes such as BBC Travel to visit Tajikistan;
- 6) Providing inclusive packages for holidays and also prepare brochures for distribution;
- 7) Inviting guests to events in Embassies and part of the format could be promoting holidays. In addition of course, the Embassy could also be utilised to promote holidays.

The Chairman asked me for support for the participation of Tajikistan at the World Travel Market London in 2020 and for the promotion of Tajikistan's tourism potential through British media. He has highlighted the most important tourism sectors to be Nature, Health, Hunting, Historical and Extreme Sports.

(SEE RECOMMENDATION 15)

11. Education in Tajikistan

As one of the main objectives of his visit to Tajikistan, it was important for me to discuss this policy area in depth and gain an understanding of education in Tajikistan.

Since independence in 1991, Tajikistan's population has increased along with the standard of living. However, Tajikistan's population is predominantly young, with 35 percent of the population under 14 years old and 61.3 percent between the ages of 15 and 64. Just 3.5 percent of the population are over the age of 65. To help deal with such a young population, Tajikistan has put into operation a number of actions which especially concern education. A specific example is the establishment of over 2,219 secondary schools between 1991 and 2015. To help facilitate this, there was the implementation of a state-led agenda for construction, reparations, classroom and laboratory provisions, digital services and teacher training.

There are issues surrounding the lack of teachers in Tajikistan. The shortage of teachers is believed to be a long-term problem unless the flow of trained teachers out of the country reduces significantly and others are encouraged to teach in Tajikistan. This affects all levels of teaching.

Compulsory schooling in Tajikistan is guaranteed for all children free of charge, under Article 41 of Tajikistan's Constitution. Basic education begins at seven years old and lasts nine years: four years of primary and five years of lower secondary. There are two years of upper secondary education. Whilst there is a high rate of enrolment and completion of primary education with gender parity, there are still some students who fail to access quality education. Moreover, even though education is free, the numbers of students in education drop dramatically once it is no longer compulsory for them to attend.

Furthermore, it can be noted that children with disabilities are the most marginalised group in the education system, with only 19 percent of children with disabilities aged 7-18 years old attended mainstream schools. However, the *National Concept on Inclusive Education for children with Disabilities in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2011-2015* was established to ensure that people with disabilities are supported and included in education in Tajikistan. Furthermore, the *Early Childhood Education Curriculum* which was adopted by the Ministry of Education in 2013, which has been supported by UNICEF and the Aga Khan Foundation, aims to promote inclusive education and provides a teacher training package to help implement the concept of inclusive education.

Overview of Higher Education

Today, there are 39 institutions of Higher Professional Education, including 14 universities, 16 institutes, one conservatory, four higher military educational institutions, four branches of Tajik and Russian universities (Moscow State University, Moscow Power Engineering Institute, National University of Science and Technology "MISiS"). There are 178,109 students studying in Tajikistan and they are taught by 11,050 teachers.

There have been around 50 intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements in the fields of education and science between Tajikistan and countries such as: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Pakistan, Latvia, Poland, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and China. The Ministry of Education and Science has sent around 30,000 students to study at universities in 28 different countries.

Meeting with Mr Rahmatulo Madayubovich Mirboboev, the Deputy Minister of Education and Science

Mr Mirboboev noted that the Tajik government and the President personally pay special attention to the study of foreign languages and therefore expressed the readiness of the Ministry to support the initiative of connecting Tajik universities with the Universities of Plymouth and Nottingham in the United Kingdom.

The Ministry has already been satisfied with the experience of setting up links between Tajik and Belarus Universities, and therefore promised to work with the Tajik Embassy in the United Kingdom. He ensured to endorse the plan and speed up the formal approval process of linkages between the Tajik National University and the Tajik Technical University and the University of Plymouth and the University of Nottingham. He cited such subjects as technology, commerce, medicine and engineering as priority areas where classes should be in English.

It should be noted that although the initiative to create joint projects between higher education institutions in Tajikistan and the United Kingdom has received high support from the relevant Tajik authorities, much needs to be done in the field of creating a legal framework between countries and building the capacity of English-speaking teachers.

Visits to the Tajik National University and the Tajik Technical University

To determine the suitability and the willingness of the Tajik universities, I met with Mr Odinzoda Haydar Odina, Rector of the Tajik Technical University and Dr Imomzoda Muhammadyusuf Saidali, Rector of the Tajik National University.

Meeting with the Tajik National University Rector

The Tajik National University was established in 1947 as the Lenin Tajik State University. It then became the Tajik State National University in 1997 and the Tajik National University in 2008.

The university has 21,347 enrolled students with 16,273 who study full-time and employs 1,225 academics. There are also 338 post-graduate students.

The university has over 150 international students and cooperates with 116 universities in foreign countries. The university also is a member of international organisations such as the *Eurasian Association of Universities*, the *University of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* and the *Network of the University of the Commonwealth of Independent States*.

The university has modern facilities which enhance the quality of education and scientific research. There is a high standard of research conducted in areas including science, economics, linguistics and humanities and social science subjects. The results of these research areas are effectively applied in practical terms.

The university has 17 faculties with 104 departments. The faculties are as follows:

- The Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics
- The Faculty of Physics
- The Faculty of Chemistry
- The Faculty of Medicine and Pharmaceuticals
- The Faculty of Biology
- The Faculty of Geology
- The Faculty of History
- The Faculty of International Policy Studies
- The Faculty of Law
- The Faculty of Philosophy
- The Faculty of Philology
- The Faculty of Russian Language and Literature
- The Faculty of Asian and European Language
- The Faculty of Journalism
- The Faculty of Economics and Management
- The Faculty of Finance and Economics
- The Faculty of Accounting and Economics

In addition to the faculties, there are 7 whole university departments, a research institute, Lyceum with a natural-mathematical bias, scientific and electronic library, 112 research and teaching laboratories, 10 internet centres, 52 computer classrooms, 39 language laboratories, bioengineering centre, technology park, centre of languages, cultural centre "Confucius", centre of periodicals, press and translation, centre of testing and monitoring of teaching quality, preparation department, 5 gyms, 3 experimental bases, preventive clinic and a first-aid post at the university.

Dr Imomzoda expressed his willingness to endorse the initiative of a linkage between the Tajik National University and the University of Plymouth. He is eager to start working on setting up cooperation with the university.

He is ready to allocate his staff to work in the settlement of legal documents and to pass the necessary procedures for the signing of a cooperation treaty. He suggested identifying three or four most demanded subjects to start with and further expand them in accordance of demand.

He noted that there is a large gap in the quality and quantity of English-speaking teachers in Tajikistan education institutions, and a relevant British organisation could help with educating Tajik teachers in English language.

I welcomed the Rector's offer to find a way for collaboration between both countries and conduct joint research projects with more practicality. I also agreed to meet with the representatives of the British Council to talk about instructing Tajik teachers in the English language.

Meeting with the Tajik Technical University Rector

The Tajik Technical University was founded in 1956 as the Stalinabad Polytechnical Institute. In 1961 it became the Tajik Polytechnical Institute and then awarded the status of Technical University in 1992. In 1997, the University was renamed after the first rector, the scientist, academic and statesman, Muhammad Osimi.

The University has seven faculties, the Khujand Polytechnical Institute and the Dushanbe Technical College. The seven faculties are as follows:

- One of the largest faculties is the Power Engineering Faculty which has seven departments covering nine specialities and has existed since the institution's inception.
- The faculty of Information and Communication Technologies and has five departments covering three specialties.
- The faculty of Innovation Technologies was formed in 2016 after the merging of two faculties: Faculty of Mechanical Technology and the Faculty of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy. It consists of nine departments covering 16 specialties.
- The Faculty of Construction and Architecture is one of the oldest faculties and has nine departments covering 11 specialties.
- The Faculty of Transport was established in 2007 to combine learning from departments which have existed since 1956 and specialties of the former Institute of Transport of Tajikistan. The Faculty consists of five departments covering eight specialties.
- The Joint Engineering Faculty was established in 2012 between the Tajik Technical University and Belarusian National Technical University. The faculty specialises in: Mechanical engineering; Construction; Architecture; Transport; and Medical equipment.

Mr Odinzoda was very enthusiastic about the initiative of cooperation with the Tajik Technical University and the University of Nottingham. He shared his positive experience of collaboration with Belarus Universities. He ensured his support but explained that cooperation must be agreed with the Ministry of Education and other relevant bodies of the Tajik government. He also noted that it would be challenging to find qualified English-speaking teachers in the country, particularly in technical subjects.

(SEE RECOMMENDATIONS 10 and 11)

12. Meeting with Aga Khan Development Network

The remote Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) is a region also known as the High Pamirs and covers nearly half of the country. This area is sparsely populated by resilient mountain peoples and the Pamiri of Tajikistan are among the world's 15 million Ismailis. The Agha Khan Foundation has invested heavily in this area and in fact has become the largest employer in the region, with a staff of 3,500.

To find out more about the Ismaili community in Tajikistan, I met with the Aga Khan Development Network's Representative in Tajikistan, Mr Qozidavlat Qoimdodov. The meeting was productive and gave me an insight into the Ismaili Community in Tajikistan and the opportunities to establish links between the community there and the community in the United Kingdom.

Mr Qoimdodov was the former Vice Speaker of Lower House of Parliament and first Deputy Prime Minister. He is currently the Aga Khan Development Network's Country Representative to Tajikistan.

He described the structure of the Aga Khan Development Network and its units in Tajikistan with brief information about their activity. He highlighted that the Aga Khan Development Network activity focused not only in GBAO but covers almost every region of Tajikistan, thus out of 60 current projects, 40 are implementing out of the GBAO.

Mr Qoimdodov mentioned that in the past he was the initiator and direct implementer of the opening of the first joint Tajik-Belarusian faculty under the Tajik universities and expressed readiness to support me in my efforts to connect Tajik universities with the Universities of Plymouth and Nottingham in the United Kingdom.

Mr Qoimdodov welcomed the plan to hold a Tajikistan Trade Conference in London and agreed to find an opportunity to contribute from the Aga Khan Development Network perspective. He also asked me to find an opportunity to lobby for the restoration of charter flights between London-Dushanbe-Delhi.

(SEE (1) OF ADDITIONAL POINTS TO NOTE)

13. Visit to Ministry of Interior and FIRE AID Project

FIRE AID is a charity registered in the United Kingdom which brings people together to provide ethical and sustainable donations of fire and rescue equipment and training to countries across the world. FIRE AID has trained over 5,000 fire fighters with over 1,000 hours of training in 53 countries. There have also been 1,000 local school children reached with preventative fire and road safety training.

In Tajikistan, there are increasing incidences of road fatalities due to a lack of training and equipment to respond effectively to incidents, despite there being highly motivated and capable crews. In 2014, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Tajikistan reported that a child or teenager is every fifth person injured. In addition to the increasing risks of road traffic collisions, Tajikistan is at high risk of natural disasters but has a limited capability to prepare or respond to disasters.

The Main Directorate of the State Fire Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan together with the British Embassy in Dushanbe, Staffordshire Emergency Services Humanitarian Aid (SESHAA), Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST) and the Young Generation of Tajikistan NGO hosted a joint ceremony to officially hand over two fire engines and fire appliances to Tajikistan's State Fire Service.

Alongside myself, the ceremony was attended by the Head of the State Fire Service of MIA Major-General Nozimjon Ibrohimzoda, British Ambassador Matthew Lawson and the representatives of other partner organisations.

In his welcome speech, General Ibrohimzoda noted that, so far, fire and mountain rescue equipment brought from the United Kingdom has helped to extinguish 370 fire cases and saved more than 150 lives in Tajikistan. His Excellency Matthew Lawson highlighted that he is proud to observe the brilliant outcomes the project has produced in terms of building the capacity of the State Fire Service. I also noted the importance of building up the resilience of Tajik firefighters and rescuers so that they could effectively respond to fire cases and traffic accidents in Tajikistan.

Since 2015, with the help of the Fire Aid project, the State Fire Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan have received six fire engines, one ambulance car and a specialised vehicle for carrying out road accident operations.

Subsequently, I have given a talk at a conference hosted by FIRE AID in London and commended the charity for the excellent work they undertake overseas and what they have done and continue to do in Tajikistan. I was also very pleased to note that FIRE AID has been involved in the training of women to be fire fighters as Tajikistan is a Muslim country and women in distress would like to be assisted by other women. More can however be done to help the authorities in Tajikistan to expand the work they do relating to the wellbeing and rescue of people in distress.

14. GCRF COMPASS Conference

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is part of the United Kingdom's official development assistance (ODA). Its aim is to support cutting-edge research and innovation that addresses the global issues affecting developing countries. Launched in 2016 with a budgeted investment of £1.5 billion between 2016 and 2021 on collaborated research and innovation.

The *GCRF COMPASS* project seeks to establish 'regional hubs of excellence' in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in Central Asia. These hubs will become lead research partners for knowledge production and transfer across the region and beyond.

As such, the project seeks to enhance relations between the United Kingdom and partner universities to achieve the following: research integration; policy impact and; sustainable communities. The project explores new approaches to governance with a focus on rehabilitation, capacity-building, peoplehood, bargaining power, and cooperative orders to make governance more effective and sustainable.

There are strategic research and educational partnerships to benefit national, regional, and global level stakeholders. There are also core development challenges which include: inclusive and equitable quality education; resilient and sustainable livelihoods; reduction of conflict and promotion of peace, justice and humanitarian action; reduction of poverty and inequality.

I attended and spoke at the plenary session of the International GCRF Conference, titled: 'Tajikistan and Cultural Diplomacy in Central Asia and Eurasia'. During the panel discussion, I highlighted the importance of education for building prosperity in the country and emphasised that "education is the key to the bright future of Tajikistan". Furthermore, responding to the questions from the audience His Excellency Matthew Lawson noted that helping Tajikistan build its resilience is the cornerstone of the United Kingdom's government mission in Tajikistan.

15. Dinner with Ambassadors hosted by HE Matthew Lawson

His Excellency Matthew Lawson held a dinner at his residence which was attended by the Ambassadors of the following countries: the USA, France, Pakistan, Belarus and Turkey. I was able to discuss with the various Ambassadors the issues and experiences relating to the activities of the people from their countries in Tajikistan. I was made aware of the challenges which they have faced and the work they have undertaken successfully.

16. General Observations

I found my visit to Tajikistan to be very enjoyable and productive. I stayed at the residence of His Excellency Matthew Lawson in Dushanbe and was shown a great deal of hospitality by the Ambassador and his wife. His Excellency the Ambassador and his staff were extremely helpful and courteous and rendered me a great deal of assistance and support. The Ambassador attended some of the meetings with me and I found his input worthwhile.

I found His Excellency Matthew Lawson to be a very able diplomat representing the interest of the United Kingdom and furthermore working effectively to build strong links between the United Kingdom and Tajikistan.

Everyone who I met on my visits was courteous and I found the people of Tajikistan to be very hospitable and friendly.

I made some extremely good connections during my visit and hope that the United Kingdom can develop its relationship with Tajikistan. The United Kingdom can indeed do more to strengthen political, economic, educational and cultural ties with Tajikistan.

17. Additional Points to Note

- 1) I was very impressed by the excellent work done by the Aga Khan Development Network. On my side, I have a connection with the Ismaili Centre in London, and I would like my connection with the Aga Khan Development Network to progress further. On my next visit, I would certainly like to go and see them.
- 2) I have a close connection with Uzbekistan and have visited the country several times. I have been a friend of Uzbekistan for many years and I have now become a friend of Tajikistan. I would like to draw the reader's attention to the final clause of paragraph six (Relationship between Tajikistan and Other Countries).
- 3) In regard to DFID, I established a good connection with to Mr Peter Fernandes Cardy who was head of DFID in Tajikistan but now has been transferred elsewhere. Mr Cardy accompanied me to some of the meetings I attended. I very much appreciate what DFID achieved under his leadership and I am sure that his good work will be continued by his successor.

18. Recommendations

- 1) We should all work together to build stronger political, economic, educational and cultural ties between the United Kingdom and Tajikistan.
- 2) During my visit, I got the clear impression that there is appetite in Tajikistan for the building of stronger ties to take place. There are indeed certain challenges which need to be dealt with.
- 3) My findings are that our Ambassador His Excellency Matthew Lawson is working very well to achieve this and furthermore His Excellency Masud Khalifazoda has a clear desire to promote the activities of Tajikistan in the United Kingdom and my dealings with him have been productive.
- 4) We must assist Tajikistan in the promotion of their trade which could include helping in the training of people and I would like to commend DFID in what they do in this regard.
- 5) Tajikistan must make efforts to iron out the red tape relating to business activities and also effectively deal with the question of taxation. Furthermore, it should perhaps consider disbanding the periodic inspection of companies which I found to create some disquiet.
- 6) There should be a trade conference organised in London which can be supported by the Department of Trade, our Ambassador in Tajikistan, the Tajikistan Ambassador to the United Kingdom and certain companies. We propose to hold this conference in April 2020 and the arrangements will be made by Mr Atam Sandhu of Developing Markets Associates. The conference must perhaps take note of my comments under paragraph nine.
- 7) It would be a good idea at some stage to send a trade delegation to Tajikistan and perhaps also think about the appointment of a Prime Minister's Trade Envoy.
- 8) I would recommend that Tajikistan gives consideration to the development of an Islamic Finance structure. I have already made reference to this in paragraph eight. As mentioned previously, there are stakeholders in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamic Finance who can provide help and assistance. The United Kingdom has the largest Islamic finance market outside the Muslim world and has considerable knowledge and experience in helping other countries in this regard.
- 9) Tajikistan is mainly a cash economy which perhaps needs to be rectified and this can be achieved by the establishment of a stable banking system and more use of debit and credit cards and also more payment via banks. The country must also think of perhaps restricting the use of foreign currency (particularly US Dollars) in shops and hotels and introduce the use of Somoni in all transactions.
- 10) We should establish closer ties between universities and other institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom and Tajikistan. In this regard, we are trying to form linkages between the Tajik National University and the Tajik Technical University and the University of Plymouth and the University of Nottingham.

- 11) There should be efforts made to teach English and this can be done either by setting up schools to teach English or by setting up a structure headed by the British Council.
- 12) We should consider assisting Tajikistan in the strengthening of institutions and other establishments relating to the judiciary, civil service, democracy and police force.
- 13) We should consider sending a British Parliamentary delegation to Tajikistan in order that the Parliament can be made aware of the situation in the country and also help to build connections.
- 14) When I was in Tajikistan, I raised the point whether a group in the Tajik Parliament could be set up which could have links with the British-Tajikistan All-Party Parliamentary Group in the British Parliament. I feel that this idea needs to be put into practice. Dr Akramsho Felaliev, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and other Parliamentarians in Tajikistan welcomed the idea.
- 15) We should indeed promote tourism and, in paragraph nine, I made certain recommendations under paragraph ten (Tourism in Tajikistan) which may be worth considering.
- 16) The Tajikistan Embassy in the United Kingdom should consider marketing their country in the United Kingdom and issue press releases periodically letting the British Parliamentarians and the media know of the good things happening in Tajikistan.
- 17) There are Presidential and Parliamentary elections to be held in 2020 and perhaps the country could consider inviting foreign observers who will be able to verify that the elections are transparent, fair and also properly organised. The United Kingdom could perhaps assist Tajikistan in setting up a proper Electoral Commission if this help is needed.
- 18) We should cooperate and work with the various agencies in Tajikistan to deal with security issues, particularly bearing in mind that Tajikistan has a border with Afghanistan where there are issues relating to drug trafficking, radicalisation and terrorism.
- 19) I did express concern that a number of people from Tajikistan emigrate to other countries and perhaps more can be done to keep professionals, which can happen if business and other activities are accelerated in the country.
- 20) During my visit to Dushanbe, I saw the statue of Ismail Samani. This statue is 25 metres tall and is a demonstration of the competency and strength of his rule in the 10th century. He is regarded as a great hero in Tajikistan and revered by the people of Tajikistan. The currency of the country is named after him. Not many people outside of Tajikistan know about Samani and I would suggest that someone undertake research and write about the life and times of Ismail Samani.
- 21) The Tajikistan Embassy should also consider holding cultural events and I was pleased to note that this has already started to be done as I have attended very successful events held at Cadogan Hall in London and at the Ismaili Centre.

- 22) With regard to the Free Economic Zone, I feel that this needs to be promoted further but the criteria for transactions could perhaps be lowered momentarily below the figure of US\$500,000. I would also like to see a representative from the Free Economic Zone to speak at the conference which we are holding in London. I may add that consideration could perhaps be given for an effective mechanism for settling trade disputes such as arbitration procedures.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mohamed Sheikh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mohamed" and the last name "Sheikh" clearly distinguishable.

The Lord Sheikh

6th January 2020