

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



April 02, 2017

The Challenges of Afghan Refugees

The interminable war and violence in Afghanistan forced a large number of Afghan people to take refuge to foreign countries. Abandoning the country seemed the only panacea for the problem since the nascent democracy could not ensure the rights and freedoms of the citizens. On the other hand, the economic stagnation and mass unemployment within the two past years aggravated the challenges. Life turned really difficult and people could hardly make the ends meet.

With the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), the rift between state and nation widened to a great extent. Perhaps, it was not due to the mismanagement of the NUG, but the end of NATO's war mission and withdrawal of the US forces and many NGOs – this signaled the failure of "war on terror" and triggered a strong sense of disappointment among the public. Foreign troops withdrew from the country while the military still could inflict casualties upon combatants and non-combatants alike.

Although Afghanistan's Constitution was approved and people elected the president and their representatives through election, there was much left to be done and insecurity was and still is a great cause for concern. Subsequently, Afghan citizens, mainly the youths, headed to take refuge in other countries.

Now the question is that have their dreams come true in foreign countries? The public exodus from many war-torn countries, including Iraq and Syria, created great challenges both for foreign countries and Afghan asylum seekers. Scores of Afghan citizens live in international camps in many countries without knowing about their fate. Of course, they risked their lives and spent a large amount of money to reach Europe. Spending many years in camps, some are deported and some other fluctuate between fear and hope – this is a really excruciating pain. Based on reports, two more planes carrying Afghans deported from Europe have arrived in Kabul after their asylum request was rejected under an agreement between the European Union and Afghan government. Hafiz Ahmad Miakhel, spokesman for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations, said that the arrivals mean 248 people have been deported from Europe to Afghanistan this year, compared with 580 throughout 2016.

Fifteen deportees arrived by chartered flight from Germany on Tuesday, while 19 landed on Wednesday from Austria and 10 from Sweden. Another flight, from Finland, is scheduled to arrive on Tuesday. European governments say those deported back have failed rigorous asylum tests, and that major cities like Kabul are sufficiently safe.

The EU signed an agreement with the Afghan government in October allowing its member states to deport an unlimited number of asylum seekers, and obliging the Afghan government to receive them.

The agreement states while a maximum of 50 non-voluntary deportees per chartered flight in the first six months after the agreement, there is no limit to the number of daily deportation flights European governments can charter to Kabul. Even as the number of Afghan deportees is rising, it still remains less compared to the thousands returning voluntarily. Nearly 55,000 migrants and refugees who were not eligible for or were likely to be denied asylum left Germany voluntarily in 2016.

Afghans were the second largest group of asylum seekers in Europe in 2015, and concerns about security and their integration have encouraged politicians to take a tougher line. However, last month Germany reported seeing an immense drop in the arrival of asylum seekers in the country, with the total number in 2016 down to less than a third of the 890,000 who arrived in 2015.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation launched an ongoing campaign "AKhpal Watan, Gul Watan" (our country, beautiful country) urging all refugees to return back to their homeland as it "needs you in reconstruction of Afghanistan". However, the questions are that will the returnees' rights and freedoms be protected? Will they be employed? Despite insisting on their return, the government cannot assure their security and employment. There seems no stronger strategy for combating terrorism and people still lose their lives under the unmitigated militancy. In other words, the Taliban's intensified attacks on one hand, and the firm foothold of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on the other hand, leave little room for optimism and hope for a safe life. It is believed that persisting on refugees to return without paving the ground for them will be counterproductive. Poverty and unemployment will force them into crime and corruption. It should be noted that many members of terrorist groups come from poor background. In brief, they joined terrorist parties to alleviate their economic challenges rather than exercising an ideology. No wonder, no effective strategy for combating terrorism or tackling the economic crises will widen the gap between state and nation.

To narrow the rift between state and nation and prevent from the exodus, the government will have to protect the rights and liberty of the citizens and create job for them. Turning a blind eye to the roots of challenges will be an egregious error. So, at least, Afghanistan's allies must focus on combating insurgency and strengthen democratic bases so that Afghan citizens do not abandon the country. Otherwise, signing contract with foreign countries to deport refugees will aggravate the problem. The state should tackle this problem more wisely.



A Blessed Bound!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

Scene is of a big wedding hall which is full of guests. In the center lies the beautifully decorated stage where a grand but empty chair is waiting for the bridegroom. The hall is divided into two portions; one bigger portion for males and the adjoining one for the females. There are many factors that tell us about the wealth and affluence of both the sides like the grand wedding hall, number of guests exceeding thousand in number, lines of luxury cars parked in the parking lot of the hall and the expensive clothes and jewelry of the guests. A light and smooth music is caressing the ears of the attendants but all the eyes are waiting for the arrival of bride and bridegroom. After some time, all the eyes turn towards the door when the bridegroom enters in the company of his relatives and friends. He is looking very handsome and charismatic with his elegant smile and beautifully chosen dress. He is given a short visit to the different tables where he welcomes the guests and exchanges greetings. Then he is made seated in his chair on the stage. His confident smile tells us about the feelings of his inner world which is filled with joy and excitement.

On the other side, the shying bride also looks like a star from the sky and she is also giving out a beautiful smile with her eyes bent down. She is going to start a new life in such a grand and pleasing manner that has made her dream in the daytime about all the good days of future to follow.

This is a time when two people get into a blessed bound that has to keep them intact all through their lives and which is supposed to get stronger with every passing day. Such a relationship starts with all the prayers and good wishes because this is not a kind of agreement or deal that should be turned back. The success or failure of any such relationship affects the lives of many and of course the couple whose future is associated with this relationship.

This fragile relationship is to be very much taken care of because its existence and successful continuation is going to ensure a happy and blessed life for many people associated with it like the couple, their parents and other relatives.

It has been noticed that if both or either of the couples was educated and sensible, things proceed very smoothly. It is necessary that right in the beginning of this new journey, the couple should ask and enquire about each other's likes and dislikes, habits like favorite dishes or clothes, and even the minute details like visiting outside or listening to music or watching TV loudly or not and many more.

This would then close the door for many occasions when they oppose each other or get disturbed by what they do not like. How wonderful it would be if couple was given a chance to meet once before the marriage to know each other and ask about the above things so if they shared anything that cannot be tolerated at any case by anyone, the process should be halted before it begins.

Most wise are those who enter this relationship expecting the differences. Great are those who try to change themselves instead of fighting with the partner and insisting him or her to change. This is rather practical and rational strategy as one might never be able to change others but can definitely change him or herself. Usually, when you try to change others, you face a strong resistance and such strained condition ends up the serenity of the house. When you try to change yourself, you discover the new traits of your personality and rise to the new levels of self-understanding and discovery.

In our system of joint families, we face numerous problems due to the behavior and attitude of our family members. Especially, a girl who leaves her family and enters a whole new set of family members of the parents, siblings and other relatives of her husband, suffers a lot to adjust and adopt to the new environment. If she was sensible enough, she would herself try all her best to make compromises and be adjusted but if not, the responsibility lies on the shoulders of her husband to guide her in this regard.

In case of any conflict between his wife and rest of the family members, he should try all his best to appear to be neutral because when he takes either of the sides, the natural equilibrium is broken and one of the sides definitely collapses. Best strategy is to convince both the parties alone and continue the efforts to resolve the issue because one can neither quit his wife nor leave the rest of his family members.

In a male dominated society like ours, rights of the women are either not considered or granted. This perception needs to be corrected that male are superior to female. No doubt, male may be dominant on female on many occasions (and it is because male have more responsibilities comparing to female) but rights of women should be very much taken care of. If one does not know about them, he needs to learn about them, both from modern and Islamic perspectives.

Usually our hardworking mothers, sisters or life partner appreciate our small acts of kindness like praise and appreciation and small presents on different occasions. Such a small but effective point should not be forgotten by any of the male members of society.

This is also necessary that male should also help women in different small chores of the house and we should correct the perception that women are meant for working all the time at house. Two important points in the end; you will get the fruits of your sincerity and have to reap the crop of your insincerity so you need to remain sincere with your life partner at all conditions. Secondly, some people think that if we get him married, he will be a better person. It may work but an innocent woman should not be made a tool in this experiment because the ratio of good results is less than

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Trump the Ideologue?

By Mark Leonard

Historians may come to see the American actor Alec Baldwin as US President Donald Trump's most useful ally. Baldwin's frequent and widely viewed impersonations of Trump on the comedy show "Saturday Night Live" turn Trumpism into a farce, blinding the president's political opponents to the seriousness of his ideology.

Of course, politicians are parodied all the time. But with Trump, there is already a tendency not to take his politics seriously. The form of those politics – unhinged tweet-storms, bald-faced lies, racist and misogynistic pronouncements, and blatant nepotism – is so bizarre and repugnant to the bureaucratic class that it can overshadow the substance.

Even those who seem to take Trump seriously are failing to get to the root of Trumpism. Democrats are so infuriated by his misogyny and xenophobia that they fail to understand how he connects with many of their former supporters. As for establishment Republicans, they are so keen to have a "Republican" in office implementing traditional conservative policies – such as deregulation and tax cuts – that they overlook the elements of his agenda that upend their orthodoxies.

Part of the problem may be that Trump has come out on both sides of most major debates, championing a brand of politics that privileges intensity over consistency. This may cause Trump-watchers to dismiss attempts to establish an ideological foundation for Trumpism – such as Julius Krein's new journal American Affairs – as hopelessly oxymoronic. But the fact that Trump is no ideologue does not mean he cannot be a conduit for a new ideology.

The British political establishment learned this lesson the hard way. For years, conservatives and liberals alike underestimated Thatcherism. They failed to see that behind Margaret Thatcher's blonde hair and shrill voice was a revolutionary politics that reflected and accelerated fundamental social and economic changes. Thatcher, like Trump, was no philosopher. But she didn't have to be. She merely had to attract people capable of refining the ideology and policy program that would eventually bear her name. And that is precisely what she did.

Apart from those ideologues, the first to grasp the significance of Thatcher's political project were on the far left: the magazine Marxism Today coined the term "Thatcherism" in 1979. These left-wing figures saw what those in the mainstream didn't: Thatcher's fundamental challenge to the economic and social structures that had been widely accepted since World War II.

An editor of that magazine, Martin Jacques, who did as much as anyone at the time to provide a theoretical understanding of Thatcherism, recently explained to me why its significance was so often overlooked. "Political analysis at that time was very psephological and institutional," he said. With its focus on "the performance of political parties," he explained, it missed "the deeper changes across society."

There are powerful parallels between the late 1970s and the pres-

ent. Just as Thatcher recognized growing dissatisfaction with the old order and gave voice to ideas that had been languishing on the margins, Trump has acknowledged and, to some extent, vindicated the anguish and anger of a large segment of the working class who are fed up with long-established systems.

Also like Thatcher, Trump has attracted ideologues ready and willing to define Trumpism for him. Front and center is Stephen Bannon, the former executive chairman of Breitbart News, the ultra-nationalist home of the racist alt-right, who now serves as Trump's chief strategist.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Bannon defined Trumpism in terms of national security and sovereignty, economic nationalism, and the "deconstruction of the administrative state." As he put it, "[W]e're a nation with an economy. Not an economy just in some global marketplace with open borders."

This reflects a fundamental conflict between Thatcherism and Trumpism: the latter aims to sweep away the neoliberal consensus of unregulated markets, privatization, free trade, and immigration that comprised the former. But, even if the ideas are different, the tactics are the same.

To consolidate support, Thatcher would go head-to-head with carefully selected enemies – from British miners to Argentina's president, General Leopoldo Galtieri, to the bureaucrats in Brussels. Similarly, as the Hudson Institute's Craig Kennedy recently told me, "Bannon wants to radicalize the anti-Trump liberals into fighting for causes which alienate them from mainstream America." Every time Trump's opponents march for women, Muslims, or sexual minorities, they fortify Trump's core support base.

Jacques argues that the British Labour Party's failure fully to come to terms with Thatcherism is the main reason it spent almost two decades in the political wilderness. He believes that Prime Minister Tony Blair was the first leader to recognize Thatcherism for what it was: a new ideology that upended long-held rules and assumptions. But, Jacques asserts, Blair merely adjusted to the new ideology, rather than attempting to change it.

None of this bodes well for Trump's opponents, who are still a long way from recognizing the ideological implications of his presidency. Indeed, they remain so distracted by Trump's apparent lack of leadership skill and even mental capacity – which, to be sure, cannot compare to that displayed by Thatcher – that they have yet to grasp the depth of the divisions and neuroses that Trump has exposed.

It might be cathartic to call Trump an idiot, to laugh at his misspelled tweets and taped-up tie, but the implications of his presidency are serious. If Trump's progressive opponents fail to engage seriously with the forces that Trump's victory reflected and reinforced – in particular, the backlash against neoliberalism – not even impeachment will be enough to put the Trumpian genie back in its bottle. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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