

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



April 11 2016

NUG Leaders Should Implement Agreement

The US Secretary of State John Kerry's remarks on the legal tenure of the National Unity Government (NUG) came as a relief for the leaders of the national unity government whose administration's legitimacy was being questioned with its failure to deliver the agreement that led to the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG). Recently, a number of major opposition groups in Afghanistan were questioning legitimacy and efficiency of government arguing that the leaders of the government have failed to implement the political reforms agreed in the power-sharing pact. The agreement states that the president has committed to convene the Loya Jirga for amending the constitution and creating a post of prime minister. NUG seems to have little time for delivering the reforms agreed in the agreement while there is no consensus among the government leaders.

In recent months, there have been increasing pressures with some opposition groups calling for salvaging the country through holding new elections. A number of high-profile political figures, the political grouping of Council for Stability and Protection of Afghanistan and some current and former government officials including President Ghani's advisors openly express doubts to credibility and efficiency of NUG. This is while the government is struggling to deal with the insurgency and contain the Taliban's post-2014 offensives.

On the other hand, there are profound differences between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah on important issues such as reforming the electoral commissions, changing the government system, dismissal and appointments in the government and peace talks with the Taliban. Many remain deeply pessimistic about the capability and sustainability of the government. John Kerry's visit to Afghanistan came at a time when the countdown for the September deadline has started. The NUG will be two years old in September but no major step is taken to restructure the government through convening Loya Jirga for amending the constitution.

John Kerry's remarks were clear that the agreement was not meant to bind the creation of the post of prime minister to the legal tenure of NUG. The comments of the US Secretary of State were crucially important for resolving the controversy over the reform deadline and the legal tenure. The US is the main supporter of Afghanistan who is propping up the Afghan government through providing the required funding for the government and security forces. The comments were particularly aimed at dissuading the Afghan political spectrum of undermining NUG at a time when it is struggling to deal with the Taliban insurgency and dealing with other challenges.

The comments came particularly as boosting President Ghani's stance over the power-sharing and implementation of the agreement that led to formation of the current government. President Ghani seemed to be unhappy with the 50-50 power-sharing between the two leaders from the very first days of the formation of the government. He still seems to be reluctant to providing legitimacy to the current mechanism of power-sharing through promoting the post of Chief Executive to that of prime minister. Government officials say that the end of the power-sharing agreement would not be the end of NUG; however, they remain vague in their comments over the role and legal status of the post of Chief Executive of the government.

The leaders of the unity government insist that they are committed to bring reforms. However, they seem to be far from having an agreement over the issue and seem to continue to play the game on. While the two leaders remain unable to resolve the issue, they still continue to remain cautious about going much beyond that could threaten the whole power-sharing agreement. In fact, both the leaders seem to be tolerating such a stalemate because of fears that their power-sharing agreement would further endanger and the credibility and legitimacy of NUG further undermined. On the US part, the relative political stability in Afghanistan is a priority for the United States while the country is preparing presidential elections.

However, the current stalemate over the implementation of the agreement that led to the formation of the NUG cannot last for long. There would be unexpected challenges for NUG if it fails to deliver the changes in the political system. The leaders need to realize potential challenges that would further undermine NUG and deteriorate political instability in the country. They need to know that the implementation of the agreement is a key for success of the government in dealing with the Taliban insurgency and other economic and political challenges. The United States needs to weigh in and put pressures on the leaders of the Afghan government to bring the expected changes in the country's political system.

The Prospects and Challenges of Economic Development

By Abdullah Ludeen

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Economic development from a policy perspective can be defined as efforts that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community by creating and retaining jobs and supporting or growing incomes in a country. Economic development can also be referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy, which leads to promote the standard of living and economic health of a country. Afghanistan is among the group of least developing countries, although it received huge amounts of international assistance during the last decade. The country still remains among the poorest countries in the region. Low infrastructure and the absence of comprehensive economic strategy and administrative capacities to develop and implement policies coupled with widespread corruption are among the key reasons for the wastage of plentiful resources.

In addition, international assistance was not properly integrated to governmental budget and instead was channeled through donors and has not contributed significantly to economic and infrastructure development of the country. Furthermore, the donor driven economy has paved the way for widespread corruption and financial resources have been exploited by a small group of politically linked individuals at the cost of the majority.

During this period, the main domestic income of the country hugely remained dependent on customs tariffs and taxes. The agriculture and industry sectors which are the key sectors for economic development were given less attention by the government. The income from customs and taxes were far less than the country's annual budget. The development budget and part of the operating budget was financed by international assistance. The existence of widespread corruption and donor-driven economy failed the country to achieve its economic development in post 2001 era. In 2014, the country faced several challenges. For instance, the security challenge due to the withdrawal of international security forces and financial challenges by falling amounts of the international financial assistance. Despite security and financial problems, the disputed presidential election was another factor which has significantly slowed down the economy of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan were expecting a strong change by the new government. Thus, an upsurge in the investment and economic growth were anticipated. But unfortunately things went wrong and the country faced more problems compare to the pre 2014 era. Thousands of people have lost their jobs and the rate of unemployment rose significantly, as a result, poverty increased and the migration of educated young generation started. However, the great dependence of Afghan government on foreign financial assistance during the last decade and eventually the significant decline of foreign financial assistance at post 2014 era, posed tremendous problems to the Afghan government. Up to date the economy of the country is declining, by passing each and every day the rate of unemployment is following the upward trend.

To overcome this problem, the economic policy makers of the country should give close attention to several factors which are vital to the economic development of the country. These factors are basically divided into economic factors and non-economic factors.

For the country's economic development the role of economic factors is decisive. To develop a self-sufficient economy in long run the policy makers should give close attention to capital formation, which refers to any method of utilizing or mobilizing capital resources for investment purposes. Thus, capital could be "formed" in the sense of "being brought together for investment purposes" in many different ways. Hence, the policy mak-

ers must increase financial inclusion and eradicate the means of financial exclusion. By increasing awareness, trust on financial sector and taking care of voluntary self-exclusion of individuals (i.e. for religious reasons such as the existence of interest in conventional banking system) will ultimately fasten the process of financial inclusion and capital formation. For instance, by introducing an efficient Islamic banking system, the policy makers can pave the way for participation of vast majority of population, who do not interact with banks because of religious reasons such as interest. The introduction of Islamic banks will increase the flow of capital to financial sector; which will ultimately increase investment, employment and production in the economy, and finally lead to economic development.

Furthermore, the principal factor affecting the development of an economy is the natural resources. There is a dire need to develop a comprehensive strategy for the extraction and utilization of natural resources and to block the means of mis-utilization of natural resources. Hence, the Afghan government has to provide security for national and international investors who are interested to invest in the mining sector of Afghanistan.

In the same manner, the government has to pay close attention to agriculture development, which has currently provided employment to huge number of people. Moreover, the policy makers have to draw a comprehensive strategy for foreign trade and provide strong support to local infant industries which are willing to start production in Afghanistan.

Most importantly, the economic policy makers must evaluate the economic system currently applicable in Afghanistan. If needed, necessary changes will be introduced to the economic system. This will help the country to have the economic system which is best suitable for the country's current economic situation.

However, among the non-economic factors important to economic development are human resources, technical knowledge and the level of education, social organization, corruption and desire to develop.

Afghan Government has to utilize the knowledge of young graduates, who have received professional degrees from local and international universities. The ministry of higher education must establish a directorate, which will create a national database to register all fresh graduates returning from international universities. This directorate will be responsible to keep communication with the ministry of labor, and other government and private organizations, the directorate will help new graduates to find jobs in public and private sectors. Taking into consideration the social organization is another important fact that has been neglected during the post 2001 era in Afghanistan. People show interest in the development activities only when they feel that the fruits of growth will be fairly distributed. Experiences from a number of countries suggest that when defective social organization allows some elite groups to appropriate the benefits of growth, the general mass of people develop apathy towards State's development programs. Under the circumstances, it is futile to hope that masses will participate in the development projects undertaken by the State. Hence, the government must try to take into consideration the social organization and make sure that economic development will benefit each and every individual in Afghanistan. Most importantly, the Afghan government must have strong agenda to eradicate corruption at any level and rank of authorities. The government must develop a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy and keep a strong will to tackle corruption irrespective of any discrimination. Finally, there is a dire need for a strong desire of government towards economic development and prosperity, having a strong motivation and appointment of highly professional, committed and uncorrupted authorities will make the goal of economic development feasible.

Abdullah Ludeen is student of PhD at Global University of Islamic Finance, Malaysia. He can be reached at ludeen18@yahoo.com

Women Condition has to be Changed!

By Dilawar Sherzai

The radical and conservative elements in Afghan society have always been against modern education. They have always taken acute steps to stop its growth in this society. And when the matter is related to the education of the girls or women, the situation becomes more intolerable for them. They do not consider women capable enough to come out of their houses and get education or participate in social and political lives. In fact, they consider it a step against their so-called "honor". Unfortunately, in the last few decades the number of such elements has kept on rising. Though there were some expectations from the society that had developed after the fall of Taliban, it has not been able to come up to the expectations, and there are clear indications that the society may get deteriorated further as far as the female education or female participation in social and political lives are concerned.

One of the greatest characteristics of a tribal and an extremist religious society is that it tends to keep intact the status quo. It does not want that the society should evolve and the developments should be made. The evolution of the society will ultimately bring about changes within the society that may disturb the social hierarchy and may compel many people who suffer under the obsolete rules, regulations, norms and values. Modern education plays a key role in facilitating the evolution of society. It may make the subjects question the obsolescence of the norms, values and ideas. It may even challenge the rule of the tribal leaders and the extremist Mullahs - who with the support of the so-called "unchangeable social status" and "undeniable religious teachings" are able to extend their rule over the poor masses. They are the ones who would be largely influenced by the spread of education. Therefore, they carry out every step to ensure that the education does not reach to their societies and they are able to rule the people in accordance to the self-centered objectives; mostly violating and discriminating others.

Though the discriminatory role of an extremist religious and tribal society affects everyone, the weaker strata of society have to face the most of it. Women in such societies, which are mostly patriarchal in nature, happen to be one of the weakest strata. Their lives and destinies are decided by the male members of the society. No major decision, relevant to their lives, is taken by themselves.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan is one of the same kinds of society. Though there have been improvements in some of the major cities, most of the areas still have the same setup. Women are considered as a commodity. They are mercilessly killed, burnt, sexually abused, married before they

are mature, married without their consent, abused as prostitutes, sold and bought, sacrificed at the altar of religious dogmas, and kept away from education. The destiny-makers of this society know that if they are given modern education, they may question the things being done to them. They may question the discriminatory rules and regulations. They may challenge the religious dogmas and ultimately challenge the Mullahs and the illiterate tribal leaders. They may change the things and that is what the makers of the society do not want them to do. They want them to be docile and obedient, as in such condition they would be easier to tackle and ruled over.

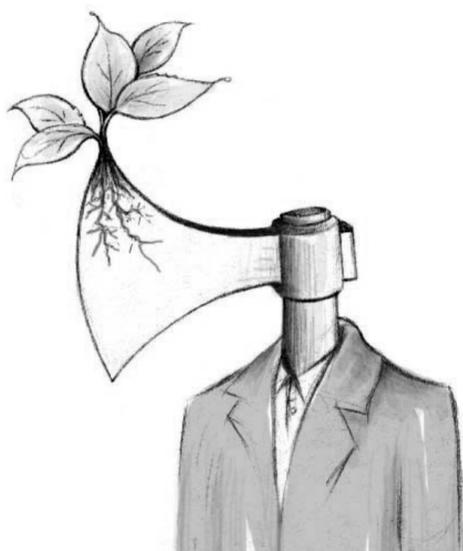
With some developments achieved in some of the areas of the country, regarding the female education, such Mullahs and tribal leaders are not very happy. They cannot tolerate it, and have decided to take serious action against all such efforts. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear the news that girls' schools are closed forcefully, the school going girls are attacked with acid and on many occasions, they are poisoned in their schools in different ways.

However, it is fortunate to note that the casualties in these incidents have been very much rare. Nevertheless, it is not to suggest that these incidents are not serious and pose no real threat to Afghan girls and their sacred intention to get modern education.

Apart from these incidents, recently there have been some other incidents as well that have revealed the vicious intentions of the obsolete Mullahs. The major of them has taken place in rural areas, where many schools, mostly the girls' schools have been shut down because of the threats from Taliban. This has influenced the schools and the study of the children, especially of the girls. This is really pathetic! They consider that by closing the schools they may harm the government, but they do not realize that, in fact, they are harming the whole society, including themselves. Or, they may realize it; and they are doing it intentionally as they do not want that there should be any development.

Modern education is necessary for Afghan society if it has to change in true sense. Same is the case with the condition and position of women; they can only change when they are given modern education. Afghan government and the Western allies have to keep this thing in mind that they have to neutralize all the efforts that are exerted to nullify the gains regarding modern education, especially of the girls. Providing a sustainable and modern education system to the children of Afghanistan will be the greatest of the services to Afghanistan.

Dilawar Sherzai is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at email.urya@gmail.com

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Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net

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