

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



April 22, 2017

On Mother Earth Day

Every year, April 22 is celebrated internationally as Mother Earth Day so as to emphasize the importance of the earth and its environment and highlight the challenges it is facing by the growing population, pollution and degradation.

The United Nations General Assembly, recognizing that Mother Earth is a common expression for the planet earth in a number of countries and regions, reflecting the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit, and noting that Earth Day is observed each year in many countries, decided to reserve April 22 as International Mother Earth Day in 2009, with resolution A/RES/63/278.

However, the Earth Day was first celebrated in the United States in 1970 and it is organized by the Earth Day Network. Its mission is to extend and diversify the environmental movement worldwide and to activate it as the most effective vehicle to build a healthy, sustainable environment, address climate change, and protect the Earth for future generations.

This year, the theme of the day is 'Environmental and Climate Literacy'. It is important that there should be awareness about the environment and a global citizenry fluent in the concepts of climate change and aware of its unprecedented threat to our planet should be built.

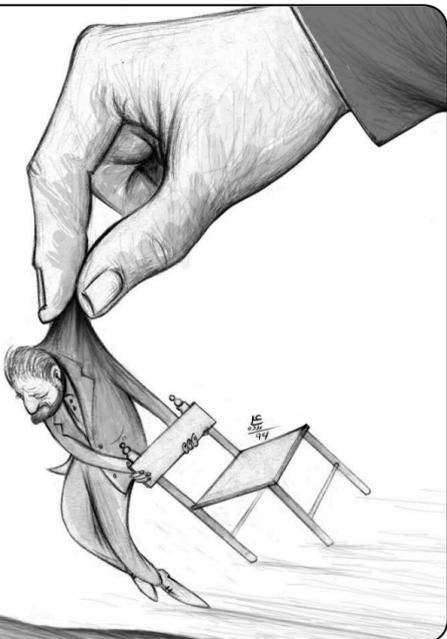
For all the inhabitants of the earth, it is crucial to understand that our earth's environment has been experiencing large scale degradation due to addition of excessive pollutants. These pollutants are basically the result of chemicals and products that are being invented and used with a great speed in the modern world. These evils have the ability to disrupt our environment and introduce disorder within the ecosystem which is crucial for the life to exist on earth. It is of vital importance to note that the possibility of life to exist within the known universe is limited to the planet earth alone. The distance of the earth from the sun, its temperature and other physical conditions exist in such an ordered manner that life is guaranteed here. Furthermore, the dependence of living beings on one another, their interactions and their reaction and influence over the environment have certain proportional arrangement, which is termed as eco-system by the scientists. If this eco-system is disturbed in some way or the other, the life is disturbed and the contaminants that are let loose by human beings in the environment has the capacity to disturb it greatly and has the capacity to endanger existence on earth.

The contaminants basically form pollution, which can influence environment in many different ways. Pollution does not affect the air alone, there are different types of pollution that include; light pollution, littering, noise pollution, soil contamination, thermal pollution, visual pollution, water pollution and some others. Though from the very inception of human beings' civilized life, pollution has been influencing human beings, nonetheless, in today's world of ours, there has been extensive increase in it. With the industrial revolution, the release of pollutants within the natural environment has kept on increasing. Today, we are standing at a stage where many serious minds think that we have to be serious about saving our earth from the menace of pollution.

There are some important concerns that most of the environmental scientists believe should be pondered upon extensively. The first one is the degradation of natural environment to the extent that can prove fatal for most of human beings. Already, the pollutants within the environment have been able to introduce different kinds of diseases in the living beings, which, if left unchecked, can go out of control.

The other concern is regarding the overall warming up of the globe; this concept is known as "global warming". This concept suggests that with the increase in pollution, there will be considerable rise within the average temperature of the world that may, at maximum, result in the liquefying of the glaciers on the poles and may drown the whole world. Moreover, considerable rise in temperature may disturb the conditions of living on earth and may disrupt the eco-system and jeopardize the existence. However, there are scientists and thinkers who believe that the climatic changes may take thousands of years. There has been cycle of changes and there will be such changes in the future as well. The climate of the earth will not keep on rising rather it will keep on experiencing fluctuations after certain years. In fact, they do not seem much convinced regarding the theory of global warming. Nevertheless, it must never be forgotten that the uncontrolled release of pollution can cause serious damage to earth and its environment.

The need of time is to save the earth by adopting appropriate policies. Any effort in this regard needs to be two-dimensional. Firstly, every individual must feel his/her responsibility towards the earth and must make sure that he/she does not become a reckless being and must prove helpful for the environment. However, extensive awareness programs in this regard can be really helpful. Mother Earth Day can be used very positively in this regard and much can be taught to the people through different sorts of programs and techniques. Secondly, there have to be efforts on national level as well. The governments in different countries can adopt strict laws regarding the safeguard of the environment and can make sure that different industries and enterprises adopt atmosphere-friendly attitude.



When Push Comes to Shove

By Hujjatullah Zia

The persistent push for talks despite the Taliban's constant refusal and their large-scale attacks against Afghan nation and National Unity Government (NUG) will not be a well-thought-of mechanism for combating terrorism. The Taliban guerilla fighters have been playing with the life of non-combatants for more than a decade and also slayed high-profile officials including the head of High Peace Council (HPC) Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and still terrorize people in one way or another. Terrorism jeopardizes the life of every Afghan citizen and it has escalated to the extent that the entire region is exposed to threat. There seems no sign of truce, however. The national and international conferences have been held with the aim of bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. For instance, Moscow sponsored a conference last week and offered to host peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

This was the third meeting Russia hosted in four months to push for political negotiations. "The parties had a frank and thorough exchange of views on the current political and military situation in Afghanistan as well as on its prospects and expressed common concern over growing terrorist activities in the country leading to rising tensions and increasing violence which adds to the predicament of the Afghan people," the Russian foreign ministry statement said.

The US, which dropped the "mother of all bombs" in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan on the eve of Moscow Conference, refused to participate in it. Perhaps, it was in the wake of Russia's refusal to join the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) that comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States and ended with the death of Mullah Omar's successor with the emergence of mistrust among the members.

Subsequently, Russia, China and Pakistan formed a trilateral group over the instability about Afghanistan without giving role to Kabul and Washington. After calling it interference in country's internal issue, Kabul was also involved in the discussion, but Washington held out against it. There is still not a common thought or mechanism for combating terrorism in Afghanistan.

For example, a non-violent strategy (peace talks) has been underlined in Moscow Conference and the participants said that there was no military solution to the Afghan crisis. Nonetheless, the US dropped the "mother of all bombs" to suggest that military deal would be the right option for counterterrorism.

It also reveals the fact that the US President Donald Trump prefers military action to negotiation.

In fact, it seems that the conflict in Afghanistan has come to a stalemate since there is an interminable fluctuation be-

tween military action and peace negotiation. In addition to military deal, the US and Afghanistan seek reconciliation process as well if there appears any possibilities. Afghanistan has constantly called warring parties to stop violence and hold negotiation, but only the Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar responded positively and reached an agreement with the NUG.

Within the last decade, many conferences were held and QCG was established to bring the Taliban to the bargain table, but all were proved abortive. It is believed that Pakistan was the last gleam of hope for Afghan government to nudge the Taliban to reconciliation process as it promised to use its "leverage" in this regard.

However, QCG ended with failure and a strong sense of mistrust emerged between Kabul and Islamabad as it resulted in harsh rhetoric. The relation between the two neighboring countries hit rock bottom after the deadly terrorist attack in Sehwan, on February 14, which left heavy casualties behind.

Recently, the US National Security Adviser H.R McMaster have reportedly met with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and discussed bilateral ties and regional developments. Sharif conveyed Pakistan's readiness to work with the international community to explore ways in which the Afghan crisis can be resolved. McMaster also met with Pakistani Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and renewed the commitment of the new administration to work closely with Pakistan in strengthening mutually beneficial relations and towards the shared objectives of peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Conveying Pakistan's concerns over the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, Aziz reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to work with the international community to support efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

He further highlighted the significance of effective border management as part of the actions required to achieve sustainable peace in the region.

The recent meeting reveals that the relation between Islamabad on one side and Kabul and Washington on the other side begins to thaw, but building trust is a highly challenging issue since Pakistan failed to fulfill its promise to nudge the Taliban to peace table.

Now the question is that after futile conferences about peace talks are there any hopes for fruitful negotiation since the Taliban played foul game? The militant fighters continue violence and bloodshed without giving NUG the green light in this regard. I wonder why the world spend time and energy on such conferences rather than targeting the terrorist hideouts and rooting out the hotbed of their radical ideology, wherever they are.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Development Beyond the Numbers

By Selim Jahan

It has been said that statistics are people with the tears washed away. This is a message that attendees of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund spring meetings in Washington, DC, should bear in mind as they assess progress on global development. Despite the impressive gains many countries have made, hundreds of millions of people are still being left behind.

To highlight this problem, the United Nations Development Program has made social and economic inclusion a major theme of its 2016 Human Development Report, "Human Development for Everyone."

The report offers an in-depth look at how countries, with support from their partners, can improve development results for all of their citizens, especially the hardest to reach.

Since the UNDP issued its first report in 1990, we have seen significant improvements made in billions of people's lives worldwide. Back then, around 35% of humanity lived in extreme poverty.

Today, that figure stands at less than 11%. Likewise, the proportion of children dying before their fifth birthday has been halved, partly because an additional two billion people now benefit from better sanitation and wider access to clean drinking water.

We should take pride in these achievements; but we must not rest on our laurels. A sizeable number of people are still missing out on these gains. Worse, they are now in danger of being forgotten - literally so. Sometimes, they are not recorded in official statistics at all. And, even when they are, national averages can paint a distorted picture: an increase in average income, for example, might conceal the deepening poverty of some, as it is offset by large gains for a wealthy few.

One of the most profound demographic shifts in recent years has been the massive expansion of a middle class in the global south.

The convergence of global incomes has blurred the line between "rich" and "poor" countries. But, at the same time, inequality within many countries has increased. As a result, poverty - in all forms - is a growing problem in many countries, even as the number of people living in poverty worldwide has declined.

Confronting this challenge will require us to rethink fundamentally what development should look like, which is why the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals, apply to all countries - not just the poorer ones.

After decades of making steady development gains, what can we do differently to help the planet's most

disadvantaged people?

As the latest Human Development Report makes clear, there is no simple answer. One reason is that those who are being left behind often face disadvantages on several fronts. They are not just short of money; often, they are also sick, uneducated, and disenfranchised.

The problems that affect the world's most disadvantaged people begin at birth, and worsen during their lifetime.

As opportunities to break the cycle are missed, these disadvantages are passed on to subsequent generations, reinforcing their impact.

Still, while today's development challenges are numerous and complex, they also share common characteristics. Many of the disadvantaged belong to specific demographic groups that tend to fare worse than others in all countries, not least because they face similar economic, legal, political, and cultural barriers.

For example, indigenous peoples constitute just 5% of the global population, but account for 15% of the world's poor.

And, to participate in work and community life, people with disabilities must overcome obstacles that the rest of us often do not even notice. Last but not least, women and girls almost everywhere continue to be under-represented in leadership and decision-making circles, and they often work more hours for less money than their male counterparts.

Although development policies will continue to focus on tangible outcomes - such as more hospitals, more children in school, and better sanitation - human development must not be reduced only to that which is quantifiable. It is time to pay more attention to the less palpable features of progress, which, while difficult to measure, are not hard to take a measure of.

All people deserve to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives; but the most marginalized in society are too often denied a say of any kind.

Ensuring that those most in need are not forgotten - and that they have the freedom to make their own choices - is just as important as delivering concrete development outcomes.

History has shown us that many of today's challenges can be overcome in the years ahead. The world has the resources and the knowhow to improve the lives of all people. We just need to empower people to use their own knowledge to shape their futures.

If we do that, more inclusive development will be within our reach. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Selim Jahan is Director of the Human Development Report Office and lead author of the Human Development Report.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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