

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



April 22, 2019

Decline in Saffron Production

Saffron in Afghanistan has been a ray of hope for the future of the country. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be managed properly by the authorities, which is turning hopes into fears. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) reported on Saturday that Saffron production has dropped by around 50 percent during the recent years. According to a statement released by MAIL, the farmers and Saffron producers were previously harvesting and producing 4 kgs of Saffron from each hectare of land cultivated with Saffron plant. However, the production level of Saffron has dropped to 2.6 kgs per hectare of land during the past 17 years which shows a production vacuum of 80 percent.

MAIL statement also highlighted that the production level of Saffron has declined mainly due to lack of access of farmers to modern cultivation practices and equipment, lack of access to high quality Saffron plants, lack of awareness regarding modern procedures to increase the cultivation of Saffron plants, and lack of information regarding the proper timing to irrigate the plants, mainly the irrigation process in the first stage after plants are cultivated.

The situation mentioned is really serious and requires proper attention and tangible measures by the authorities. The authorities must realize that the production of saffron in Afghanistan has proved to be very productive and positive. It has brought a new ray of hope for Afghan economy and a substitute for poppy cultivation.

Moreover, Afghan saffron has proved to be of high quality as well. In a report in 2017, the International Taste and Quality Institute in Brussels ranked Afghan saffron the best in the world in taste and quality amongst 300 samples from different countries. Afghanistan acquired recognition on international scale for its saffron products in a very short period of time due to its unique qualities. In international market, Afghan saffron products compete with saffron products from Iran and Spain. The average price for Afghanistan's saffron is \$3,000/kg due to its quality and fragrance.

In addition, it should also be noted that saffron can help us in some other ways as well. It can be used as an alternative crop to discourage poppy cultivation in the country that has been influencing our country in various ways. It has not only given us the evil of drug addiction that is taking the lives of many Afghan youth but has also strengthened the terrorism and terrorist networks as most of the Taliban terrorists receive their funding from poppy business.

It is important to understand that one of the best ways to control poppy is to motivate the farmers not to grow the poppy crops from the very beginning. Motivating farmers and landlords to grow saffron as an alternative crop can be one of the best solutions as it is practicable and may bring the farmers and landlords profit as well. Saffron has different advantages as compared to poppy cultivation and among them the most important one is that it does not bring harm to human life, it is legal and does not go against the teachings of Islam. It is one of those crops that have the capability to be grown in dry environment. Moreover, it does not need much irrigation as well. Simple irrigation two or three times a year would do the trick; in that sense, it is draught resistant. Poppy cultivation, in contrast, would require an extensive irrigation plan - six times a year.

Saffron has different uses and, in fact, makes life healthier. The common use of saffron can be found in adding flavor to dishes, preparing different types of medicines, hot drinks, appetizers and perfumes. Moreover, it has demand in the international market as well.

According to market studies, regionally the price of saffron is around USD 5,000; while the international price may even reach to USD 7,000. This shows that it is very lucrative and can be used as one of the basic exports of Afghanistan. It is also important to mention that the demand for saffron is very high both in regional and international markets.

What Afghan authorities and people require in this regard is proper implementations of their policies to change the scenario. It is true that the producers of drugs have stronghold in our country, but unshakable decision both by government authorities and Afghan people can defeat them. If Afghan authorities are really interested in making saffron as the leading export of the country and controlling the menace of drugs and stopping it from financing terrorism and bringing sufferings and death to common Afghan people through addiction, it has to launch a comprehensive strategy for the growth, production and proper export of saffron. The current decline in production should be considered seriously and efforts must be made to improve the production as per the potentials so that maximum outcomes can be achieved.



The Political Crisis amid Loya Jirga and Peace Talks

By: M.Karimi

The coalition government in Afghanistan has been experiencing problems from the start, inevitably due to the crisis that surfaced up after the presidential elections of 2014. The then secretary of State of the United States launched a political initiative that had no prior record in the history of Afghanistan, however, despite acceptance of U.S. secretary's offer by the political forces, the National Unity Government (NUG) started its tenure with huge issues ahead of it, the general process of work and decision making did not proceed in a systematic and harmonious way. In the first joint process of the "Electoral reforms", every leader in the government tried to influence electoral reforms mechanism with their specific frame of thoughts and opinions, on the other hand, same sort of problems was witnessed in distribution of governmental posts.

With the span of time, relations between the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) improved, and they advanced on number of issues with mutual understanding. At that time, there were two basic factors for the tensions to exist: First one was related to the general interests of the system and the people of Afghanistan, which was obviously damaged by some controversy in many cases, the second one was personal relationships of the leaders of state and non familiarity with each other's personal traits. However, almost five years since the commencement of the National Unity Government (NUG), once again, a protest speech comes from the head of the executive, that is not in tandem with the system and government, and somehow shows dissatisfaction with the decision of the organ. In the recent days, similar kind of convergence and unanimity erupted towards the Taliban on the eve of the Doha summit between politicians and political factions over the basic principles of the "Peace Talks", but the current statement by the chief executive about "Boycott of the Loya Jirga of the consultative Peace" is of symbolic order.

This will undermine the internal challenges of the current leadership, and weaken the position of Afghan government in the bargaining for peace. Dr. Abdullah's Kabul consultative Jirga's boycott shows that there is no political consensus within the national unity government, that is why no agreement has been formed on the list of participants in the forthcoming Qatar Summit.

The meeting was not held until the Supreme Council for Peace, and some influential politicians met at Hamid Karzai's house and decided that they would not take part in Jirga if the government

officials did not attend the Qatar summit. If this happens, the political climate in Afghanistan will get back to old days.

All political efforts of recent weeks in Kabul were focused on a panel of political forces, civil society activists and women's rights activists to participate in the Qatar summit in a unified and clear manner to represent the entire Republic of Afghanistan, keeping in mind that the Moscow summit in Afghanistan this year has made Afghanistan's peace policy a bipolar one.

There is a grave need of some genuine political efforts in Kabul to prevent the political differences caused by Qatar meeting. Those who demand prevention of the state order and the republican system in Afghanistan are trying to pave the way for improper and abrupt withdrawal of U.S. forces, and create a situation where political leaders are stranded.

The ongoing situation in the political arena of Afghanistan demands that the political parties, influential community heads, and leaders of the NUG must identify list of the participating members in the Qatar summit. Government leaders should erect their positions on peace consultative jirga as soon as possible, and the leaders of the NUG shall not take such confronting measures, due to which the position of Afghanistan is weakened.

Seemingly Afghanistan's international allies are not happy with political plundering in Kabul. Mr. Khalilzad and other diplomats from contributing countries have repeatedly said that the national negotiating body should be identified as soon as possible and that political forces should sacrifice their personal interests for keeping the public interest higher, moreover Afghanistan is no longer in a position to tolerate factional confrontations within the government.

While United States is trying to resolve the issues with the Taliban. Cessation of violence and the "Peace Negotiations" for the country's political future depends on the Afghans themselves. At this stage, all the intangible political forces that are part of the republican order should bring together a national delegation to negotiate in spite of the political, intellectual and other differences.

If the consultative jirga is in the interest of Afghanistan, every political force should attend, the presidency should talk to all presidential candidates, politicians and political forces. A formation of consultative jirga based on the whims and wishes of the current president can bring differences to a level of no return.

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The Structure of a Diplomatic Revolution

By: Richard N. Haass

It has been nearly 60 years since the philosopher and historian Thomas Kuhn wrote his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn's thesis was simple but heretical: breakthroughs in science occur not through the gradual accumulation of small changes to existing thinking, but rather from the sudden emergence of radical ideas that cause existing models to be replaced with something fundamentally different. As was the case when astronomers determined that the earth revolves around the sun and not vice versa, these "paradigm shifts" usher in an entirely new model that becomes the basis for "normal" scientific study and experimentation until it, too, is replaced.

I mention Kuhn because his idea is as relevant for social science as it is for natural science. The example I have in mind is the contemporary Middle East, where the current paradigm between Israel and its neighbors has prevailed for more than a half-century.

Nearly everything said and written about the issue reflects the outcome of the June 1967 Six-Day War, which left Israel in control of territories that had previously belonged to Jordan (East Jerusalem and the West Bank), Egypt (the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza) and Syria (the Golan Heights). Since then, the "normal" diplomatic model (enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 242 and subsequent resolutions) has assumed that Israel would trade this territory in exchange for security and peace.

For some time, the paradigm appeared to have validity. Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt, allowing the two countries to sign a peace treaty that has endured to this day. Years later, Israel and Jordan normalized their relationship. Negotiations between Syria and Israel came close to succeeding, but failed in the end, largely because Syria's president, Hafez al-Assad (the father of current Syrian President Bashar al-Assad), was unwilling to sign on to a compromise.

It is no longer possible to imagine peace talks, much less agreements, between Assad's government and that of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. The Israeli government long ago annexed the Golan Heights, and now Assad's government increasingly depends on Israel's archenemy, Iran, for its survival, and instead of negotiations, we see Israel attacking Iranian forces and equipment on Syrian territory.

Diplomatic progress between Israel and the Palestinians is equally difficult to imagine. This was not always the case. Negotiations came close several times to establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel under terms that both sides could accept. But at the last minute, Palestinian leaders balked, fearing that agreeing to less than what they had historically claimed to be Palestine would leave them politically vulnerable to hardliners who believed that compromise was unnecessary because time and world opinion were on the Palestinians' side.

This was a historic error. What was on offer in the past is no longer. Israeli politics has shifted decisively rightward. Jewish settlements on the West Bank have grown dramatically in terms of both area and population. Netanyahu explicitly promised during the recent election campaign to begin annexation of the West Bank. US President Donald Trump, whose administration moved the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and reversed nearly 40 years of US policy by recognizing Israel's authority over the Golan Heights, may well support further Israeli annexation.

Much of the world has grown weary of the conflict. Quite a few Arab governments, worried about Iran or internal threats more than Israel, are prepared to work with Israel quietly, and in some cases openly. Splits within the Palestinian leadership are exacerbating persistent divisions on what to ask of Israel and what to accept. The Trump administration may well unveil a peace initiative in this context. But its proposal is unlikely to deal with the territorial, political, and refugee issues that are central to the creation of a Palestinian state. A Trump plan is more likely to focus on offering economic incentives to Palestinians in an effort to encourage them to compromise. It is unlikely to succeed.

The most likely future is thus one of drift. Palestinians will continue to have limited autonomy in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. At some point (one we have ceased, if not reached), the potential for a viable Palestinian state will cease to exist.

All of this poses a risk to Israel as well. There is an unresolvable tension between Israel remaining a Jewish state and a democratic one if it continues to exercise political control over millions of Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens. Avoiding this choice and maintaining the status quo will frustrate Palestinians and increasingly isolate Israel in the region and the world (especially if annexation occurs). Some will argue that this assessment is too bleak. I hope they are right. But even if they are, the benefits of progress between Israelis and Palestinians will not spread. Closely associated with the territory-for-peace paradigm was the belief that, by ushering in peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, an Israeli-Palestinian settlement would enable the region to flourish. But resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not end the civil war in Syria or the slaughter in Yemen, curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions, restrain Saudi Arabia's leaders, or ameliorate the repression and corruption that are commonplace throughout the region.

So even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were to end, the Middle East's problems would not. And there is no reason to predict the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will end. It is time for a paradigm shift in how we think about the Middle East, not because a better diplomatic model has presented itself (it has not), but because the current paradigm is increasingly at odds with reality.

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