

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



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## Providing Food to All

Afghanistan is a country that has experienced years of insecurity and instability; therefore, the country has not been able to strengthen its basic infrastructure that can help the people in acquiring their most rudimentary requirements. It is the reason that even food is scarce in the country, and there are thousands of people who have no access to sufficient meal every day. According to food security assessment, about 1.6 million people are the victim of severe food insecurity, while about 7.5 million are moderate food insecure; therefore, many people are compelled to sell land, discontinue the education of their children and make them work, or depend on relatives for support. Unfortunately, number of people engaged in these last-ditch actions has increased because of unavoidable circumstances. As a matter of fact, one third of the Afghan population is food-insecure and their situation continues to worsen; however, there is no strategy to tackle the problem and solve this crucial issue. The whole government apparatus seems to be busy with the security concerns, while the most basic requirements that can result in larger catastrophes than the prevailing insecurity, remain forgotten. On the other hand, the country, does not have any mechanism of its own that can help it in difficult times and, even, it has not been able to strengthen its agriculture sector.

In fact, the agricultural sector in Afghanistan has not been able to fulfill the requirements of the people as it has not been given proper attention by the concerned authorities. Mostly, this sector is highly dependent on the individual farmers and landowners. Most of them grow as much as they require themselves. Further, the growth of narcotics in the country leaves little room for the lands to be used for the cultivation of other necessary items that can fulfill the food requirement of the people. The government does not have any comprehensive strategy regarding the development of the agricultural sector on the basis of modern techniques. Therefore a large number of people, each year, have to look at the other countries for help in order to have food to eat. The international organizations in this regard have been fulfilling the food requirements of the country to a large extent, thus making the burden of the government much lighter. But this sort of help can never be permanent and it has already been facing difficulties as the donor countries that have been sponsoring such programs have decreased their contributions to a certain extent.

The food shortage itself is a sure problem, but there are many other problems that are directly linked with the hunger that result from such shortages. Many social evils will find their way in the society and will further deteriorate the country's socio-political scenario. More people would be involved in crimes in order to feed themselves and their families. Two major problems in the country have been greatly strengthened by the continuous hunger and poverty. The first one that has been threatening the whole world is the growing terrorism in the region. The people suffering from hunger and poverty are very much likely to become part of terrorist organizations that are ready to provide them their living. Who does not know that the suicide bombers are easily available for some hundred dollars throughout the region? The second problem that has made the country much notorious like terrorism is the production and trafficking of narcotics. Afghanistan is considered one of the leading countries in this regard. And now the phenomenon has become a part of organized crime in the country, with the involvement of national and international mafia. The poor and hungry people of the country are ready to become a part of this menace instead of suffering because of intense deprivation. They either become a part of its production or trafficking as they are paid handsomely in this regard. Further, the demand of the narcotics also makes many people think of using their lands for poppy cultivation rather than deciding to grow the crops that can yield food for the people.

The important question at this instance is how long can we rely on international organizations and community to feed us and amend us? We can be self-reliant in so many areas; all we need is to throw away the begging bowl and use our own resources appropriately and, no doubt, honestly. Had we been doing that for the last few years, we would now be standing on our own. But unfortunately, the self-centered people among us who have just been filling their own pockets have made our people suffer to a great extent. They do not feel even for those people who do not have a single meal to eat throughout a week. Their children die of hunger and unknown diseases and their conscience saunter in the dark alleys of guilt, frustration and revenge.

## The Fruit of China's Economic Development

By Hujjatullah Zia

The year 2018 marks the 40 anniversary of China's reform and opening-up which prompted China to alleviate poverty and stand as the world second largest economy. Since then, 800 million people were lifted out of poverty and efforts for building a moderately prosperous society continue.

A large number of Chinese provinces are dependent on tourists, unlike to that of Afghanistan, and contribute tremendously to poverty alleviation. To preserve their culture, on the one hand, and attract tourists, on the other hand, Chinese ethnic minority groups conduct cultural festivals: Donning traditional dresses, singing the soulful songs of their ancestors in modern theaters, and dancing and playing their old musical instruments – these ancient, cultural festivals will fill one with strong nostalgic feelings and serve as appetizers for visitors/tourists.

The 56 ethnic groups, with 55 minorities, officially recognized in China, form a colorful culture and being strongly supported by the government regardless of their ethnicity or religious beliefs to participate in poverty alleviation and contribute to the country's economy. On my five-day trip to Liupanshui city of Guizhou province, in which 45 foreign and domestic reporters and 20 students from ASEAN countries attended, I was amazed at jaw-dropping economic development and tourist destinations of Guizhou province, which used to be one of the poorest provinces of China.

The current year also marks the 40 anniversary of the establishment of Liupanshui city, located in the western Wumeng mountain area of Guizhou province. Liupanshui is dubbed as "the Cool City of China" for having average temperature. Chinese government seeks to build mountain health tourism products system and more than 10 essential tourism zones, including 6 national 4A level tourism attractions and 6 provincial tourist resorts, have been completed in Liupanshui. According to Wang Zhiqiu, director of editorial department from People's Daily's Guizhou Bureau, Liupanshui has undergone tremendous changes in the wake of reform and opening-up with the three most prominent ones known as "reform of resource changing into assets", "capital changing into stocks" and "farmers changing into shareholders".

Last year, Liupanshui received more than 30 million tourists and generated tourism revenue of over 20 billion yuan. In the first quarter of the current year, the number of tourists reached 11.09 million, an increase of 60.8 percent over the same period last year.

The continuous "blowout" growth of tourism industry has contributed to the economic and social development of the city and the added value of tourism accounted for 6.8 percent of GDP.

The airport and roads in the mountainous province of Guizhou are one of the main reasons behind its economic progress. That is to say, the Chinese believe that connectivity and opening-up will be the backbone of economic development of a country. A Chinese saying goes, "If you want to be rich, you must build roads at first." It indicates that the transportation construction is a key condition of economic development and will promote regional economic coordinated development. If there is no connectivity or no "go global" and "bringing in", the two principles strongly pursued by Chinese government, there will be no economic development. Since China has tasted the sweet fruit of reform and opening-up, it seeks to open wider to the outside world and extend people-to-people and state-to-state exchanges.

To view Afghanistan, it is also rich in culture but there is shortage of linking and connectivity. How many international airports does Afghanistan have? Above all, there is a wide gap between rural and urban areas.

There is great economic potential in Afghanistan such as untapped mineral resources and colorful cultural festivals but its connectivity with the outside world is extremely limited. If the government really seeks to develop the economy, it has to invest on roads, infrastructures and tourist sites. For example, building international airports in Bamyan and Badakhshan district of Wakhan, which are both secure and ancient, and many other secure cities and provinces will do tremendous contribution to the country's economy. If people from around the world could directly travel to secure and ancient places, they would not hesitate to do so. In such a case, ethnic groups will be able to showcase their culture similar to that of China to attract tourists and contribute to the country's economy.

Visiting the mountainous districts and areas of Guizhou, I remembered the ancient places of Afghanistan which are similar to those areas in terms of mineral resources and cultural baggage. To alleviate poverty and develop the country's economy, Afghanistan will have to follow the developing countries, mainly China, which is ready to share the fruit of its development with developing and under-developed countries including Afghanistan.

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## Lack of Oversight on Performance at Government Institutions Exacerbates the Sorry State of Governance & Public Services (Last Part)

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Ministry of agriculture, ministry of women affairs, ministry of narcotics ministry of mines and minerals and Kabul Municipality are all Zombie bodies and need extensive oversight and overhaul in order to effect structural changes in these institutions. Agriculture is the backbone of Afghanistan's economy. This sector employs more than seventy percent of rural population in the country. Keeping in mind the resources available, donor countries' and donor organizations' contributions in hundreds of millions of dollars during the last one decade, there is no visible improvement in agricultural sector. Despite availability of hundreds of acres of agricultural lands across the country, no major national plans have been produced and/or implemented to develop these lands. Also, farmers and landlords are eking out on meager resources that have at hands because they do not receive any kind of Government assistance or subsidy to compensate them for the hard work they endure to grow crops. This sector is at miserable state. Intervention by certain donor organizations or NGOs cannot be counted on at national level, as they provide assistance to hand-picked farmers and landowners. In addition, their intervention does not fit any larger Government plans or strategy. They have the budget to spend within certain timeframe in that sector. Therefore, these are spasmodic responses, which cannot have major, long term impact on farmers or agricultural produce. The Government should put in place 'money spent audit' and 'project impact and result audit' in order to make this important institution responsible and able to deliver.

Ministry of Narcotics spends hundreds of millions of dollars every year, but it fails to curb on the output of narcotics. Insecurity and absence of law and order has been blamed by the concerned ministry for not being able to control the illegal crops. But there are many other ways to control or at least reduce growing narcotics by farmers. Introduction of considerable subsidy is one of the most effective means to apply and encourage farmers and landowners to grow conventional crops. It needs resolve and commitment on the part of leaders running ministry of narcotics to find ways to curb or bring complete stop on this crops. They need to work hard, take advantage of countries which successfully eradicated narcotics and smuggle of illegal drugs in all its forms, from their countries. Ministry of Narcotics should establish coordination body comprised of senior officials of ministry of agriculture, ministry of interior and ministry of narcotics, and work together to find effective ways to curb this illegal crops. Brining in knowledge, experience and execution power in the efforts can definitely yield results.

The ministry of women affairs comfortably falls in the category of Zombie organizations. There are no visible improvements in women's lives and the sector this ministry is working. Plight of women in Afghanistan continues to take toll on half the nation i.e. women. Ministry of women should have designed projects, educational programs, trainings and secure economic platforms for women to uplift their living standards. There are many countries – including People's Republic of China – which leadership of this ministry can learn from and get advice concerning design and implementation of projects that can benefit women in Afghanistan. It is the responsibility of Government leaders and senior official to develop landscape of opportunities and vulnerabilities and develop programs and projects that can address the issues facing women in Afghanistan. This can be done by preparation

and submittal of comprehensive proposals and plans, and present them to donor and international communities for funding. There is no such large scale enterprise undertaken by ministry officials, and this is truly, waste of time, resources and an effort to keep the status quo to drag on the present corrupt system, which would continue to benefit few and deprive large portion of masses from development projects. Afghanistan is one of the worst places for women around the globe. There are thousands of areas that need intervention in support of women's living conditions, education, training and their awareness about their rights in society. Attending meetings at national and international levels and discussing plight of Afghan women is one of the smallest part of the job entrusted to ministry of women's affairs. The real job is to get out in the field, establish coordination mechanism and cooperation with security organizations, human right organizations, office of the Attorney General and courts, local communities and civil society so that to level playing field for all parties to work towards projects that benefit women in the country.

Ministry of mines and minerals continues to drag on with old issues, and lack of strong leadership and new management in this ministry continue to take toll on overall economy of the country. It needs hard work and moving out of comfort zone on the part of the ministry leaders to develop attractive plans for investment in areas of mining, water and energy sector and iron ores etc. Ministry of mines should develop projects in support of training young students and graduates in the fields of mining so that human resources and knowledge house is already in place in the country. In order to do this, ministry officials should take advantage of the present scholarship opportunities that are offered by friendly countries and encourage students to specialize in areas of mining and petroleum. In addition, it is incumbent on ministry officials to level playing fields for development of mining and extract industry so that international, professional firms come and participate in the process of bidding and completion in the field. I have written another article few months ago, which mainly touches mining and construction industries ([http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post\\_id=20888](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=20888)).

The press is one of the important pillars that keep democracy functioning in a country. It is the platform whereby people are informed about decisions made by government leaders that affect their lives, and also people can reach out to their representatives in government organizations through free press. But it seems no one in the government is concerned about these Op-Ed writings – at least my experience proves this. Like all other countries at war, Afghanistan has problems. But to solve these problems, or take remedial actions towards solution of governance and public services issues is not insurmountable. Afghanistan has legitimate government, strong international support and recognition, more than enough resources allocated to ministries and various government organizations, a functioning military and police force, improving judiciary and justice departments (courts and Office of the Attorney General), and a burgeoning private sector and middle class in the making. These are positive developments and the Government should build on these and move fast to improve and structurally change those institutions and ministries which are not performing. Mohammed Gul Sahibzada is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammed.g.sahibzada@gmail.com



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