

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



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The Worth of Good Governance

Favorable, fair, and effective governance is clearly one of the most dominant factors for sustainable development. Today good governance is also a key to sustainable development. Honest and competent governance effects every aspect of one's life from the protection of our basic human rights to food and water security. Governance is more than just government, it includes everything from an impartial and efficient judicial system to schools and healthcare, to an economic system that offers job security and a living wage. Its foundation is a strong and vital civil society.

The impacts of poor governance are severe. Ineffective or corrupt governments can allow, or even promote, resource depletion and environmental destruction. They can distort and disrupt local and national economies, impoverishing citizens as well as frightening away investors. In extreme cases, poor governance leads to civil or international conflict. This conflict perpetuates a cycle in which all the components of a healthy civil society are destroyed, and government itself loses connection with its people. In industrialized nations unresponsive, careless governance produces equally devastating results: the apathy and disengagement of its citizens. People adopt a "why bother?" attitude about politics and government. Stronger institutions of governance can manage more effectively the interdependence between economies and eco-systems. In such a way, capable governance can develop lasting solutions to key environmental issues such as global climate change, ozone depletion, and associated health risks. There are many ways to strengthen governance. One of them is to create conditions supportive of democracy such as literacy, a free press and flow of information, and gender and class equality. Nations can recognize and train effective leaders at all levels. Pioneering organizations have also created ways of identifying and publicizing corrupt behavior and then insisting on accountability. Effective economic development that benefits all segments of society is also an essential ingredient in strengthening governance.

The benefits of good governance range from an enhanced quality of life for all citizens of each nation to a more responsible, accountable relationship with the environment. A strong and healthy civil society carries with it an almost automatic assurance of reduction in poverty. And, most importantly, the spread of good governance within nations will ultimately lead to diminished conflict and greater possibility of peace between nations. The UNDP defines governance as "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It [includes the] processes... and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences". The three interconnected parts that constitute the governance are the state, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The media also plays an essential role in effective governance by enhancing communication among all sectors. Key factors in determining the quality of good governance are responsiveness and involvement. Good governance means that stakeholders or beneficiaries feel like they have a voice in what affects them and that their particular interests are recognized. In both the developing and industrialized world, civil society is the most important building block in this process. It is made up of everything from community centers to credit unions to cultural organizations. Governance is the glue that holds a society together. In prehistoric times, isolated bands of hunters and gatherers had little need for complicated governance. But as people settled in one place and agricultural societies grew in size, legal and political systems grew in response. The more complicated and diverse the society, the greater the need for effective governance: this could range from an all-powerful monarch to a very inclusive, participatory democracy. Of the nearly 200 sovereign nations of the world at the beginning of the 21st century each has some kind of political system.

All the nations of the world have within them components of good and bad governance. Developing countries - many of them former colonies - often have inherited a top-down system of government in which politicians and civil servants see no need to be accountable to their constituents. The result is often system-wide corruption from the lowest village headman to head of state. All citizens suffer as a result, but none more than the poor peasant who has the greatest need for services like health care and education. Ineffective, corrupt governments do little to prevent resource depletion and environmental degradation. Without accountability to their citizens, they often reach economic agreements that offer short-term profits but have a devastating effect on the local environment. There is also little provision for governmental oversight of the activities of corporations and, even if there are laws and rules to protect the environment they are often not enforced. Effective governance rests on a dependable revenue base. Without adequate funds to pay civil servants and maintain basic services, a nation risks collapse.

Many countries of the world have never been able to rely on tax revenues to meet their budgetary needs. Citizens simply do not pay their income taxes or the government may impose taxes and duties that are inequitable and punitive. Outside the economic sphere, bad governance impacts the quality of life of everyone in a country, from the poorest peasant to the most privileged. Not only are human rights disregarded or enforced inconsistently, but also essential services as well as adequate food and clean water simply do not reach those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. In matters of food and water security the interests of the political elite are served and the rights of majority often disregarded.

Obstacles before Democracy

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the withdrawal of coalition forces in 2014, the insurgency has increased in Afghanistan and engendered fear and disappointment among the public. Afghan nation bore the brunt of militancy within the two past years and found their civil rights and freedom at stake since warring parties ushered in indiscriminate killings. The appointment of Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada as Mansour's successor has further undermined the political stability and inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan combatants and non-combatants.

Afghan nation fluctuated between high hopes and unmitigated despair. The presidential election held in 2014 and candidates' mouth-watering promises filled the nation with a sense of hope and trust. Election - which is a "festival of democracy" - was considered to be a historical milestone and form a society void of violence and bloodshed. Afghans dreamed of a utopian community, where their rights and liberty were respected and they would not suffer on the basis of their caste, creed and color.

Indeed, people will nurture a strong social bond and political solidarity under the true spirit of democracy and differences will not trigger negative sentiments among the public. Similarly, the state will have to strengthen national unity, social cohesion and territorial integrity through safeguarding citizens' rights and liberty - as candidates vowed to during their presidential campaigns.

To Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) did not declare the final and definite result of the hotly contested election due to lack of transparency and Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah established a National Unity Government (NUG) through political negotiation. Since IEC was implicated in the scandal, a central part in the negotiation was a commitment to electoral reform - which is still an issue. In sum, this false start diminished the public hope. In addition, political dilemma about selecting cabinet members was a second slap in the face of democracy and led the country towards serious crisis. Despite mounting insurgency, the key posts, including Ministry of Defense, were controlled by acting heads for a long period. The security situation changed subtly from bad to worse and the NUG encountered the predicament of Taliban's spring offensive declared last year. Therefore, Afghan soldiers and U.S. residual forces are in the throes of protracted war imposed by the Taliban.

A number of the Taliban members have allegedly pledged loyalty to the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) - which has gained a firm foothold in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan.

Evidence suggests that the emergence of ISIL group has aggravated the security situation as it stoked sectarian violence and abducted the individuals on the grounds of their race and color.

Up to now, the militancy left heavy casualties behind. Based on the UN's report, at least 1,601 civilian have been killed and 3,565 others wounded in the first half of the current year, showing a record surge of four percent compared to the same period in 2015.

To consider the facts objectively, the grotesque reports about civilian casualties will weaken the public sentiments and erode the nation-state trust. Contrary to the candidates' statements and their agenda that suggested political and economic reforms, the challenges, including militancy and death toll, have increased. The aforementioned issues unmask the fact that the state is embroiled in challenges existing inside and outside the government's machinery.

The political conflicts between the heads of the NUG led to a nation-state gap and redirected the government's energy from combating terrorism to less important issues. Rather than adopting an effective mechanism to counter insurgency, they condemned terrorist networks for carrying out suicide attacks and accused Pakistan of providing safe havens for them - the assailing failed to decrease insurgency.

On the other hand, the Taliban outfit sought to fish in the troubled waters through intensifying their attacks. In spite of peace offering from Afghan government, they declared spring offensive and staged heavy attacks against the country. Moreover, a number of the Taliban members pledged allegiance to the ISIL group following the death of Mullah Omar - which resulted in splinter group - and left Afghan nation at the mercy of greater violence and bloodshed.

Appointed as Omar's successor, Mullah Akhtar Mansour bitterly opposed the peace talks and signaled it as "enemy's propaganda". He orchestrated more deadly attacks against Afghan nation and spilt the blood of men, women and children without an iota of mercy. As ever, the Taliban militants trampled upon human rights and dignity of the public and impaired democratic values in the country. Currently, since violating human rights is prevalent in the country, due to escalated militancy, the inference of political analysts is that the nascent democracy will not bear the desired fruit in Afghanistan despite the approval of Constitution and elections held to establish democratic administration.

To strengthen democratic bases, the government will have to advocate human rights in the face of mounting insurgency - it is possible if the authorities remain loyal to their commitments made for the community. Additionally, the strike against warring parties should increase. Democracy will come to fruition if the government adopts defensive and offensive mechanisms for protecting the rights and liberty of the public and resolve the internal challenges, which put obstacles before democracy, through amiable discussions.

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English Language is an Opportunity or Threat?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Hundreds of private English-language centers, with tens of thousands of students, are mushrooming all over Afghanistan. An explosion in English language studies, fuelled by the growing dominance of American culture and the financial realities of globalization, is unprecedented in a country which is thousands of miles away from the nearest English-speaking nation. Interest in English increased dramatically after the fall of Taliban in 2001 and with the arrival of the United Nations and other international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in developmental work. And one can easily see its influence on local languages. Even in remote towns you hear boys and girls speaking English. Bilingual store signs, street boards and restaurant menus widely seen in the cities. Hundreds of English words have already become part of the daily conversation. In the past, English language was taught as a subject from the seventh grade in schools but in post-Taliban Afghanistan, it starts in the fourth grade. The education ministry has provided syllabus for schools and there is a nationwide drive aimed at making English the primary foreign language taught in the country. There are few jobs available in the public sector and the handful of employment opportunities at foreign aid agencies makes knowledge of English invaluable.

English is not only a requirement to work for a foreign NGO but it is also required for many government jobs. When you apply for a job, the first thing they ask is how good your knowledge of English language is. Hundreds of thousands of co-system English language centers provide English language programs in all provinces. In some centers, there are exclusively female classes taken by female or male instructors. Girls are increasingly taking more interest in English, especially those who have their family members overseas as accepted refugees.

It is widely accepted that English has become the language of choice for many international scholarly journals and considered as an irreversible tool to academic and professional tool. The trend is on a rise, and academia is left with almost no choice but to publish in English in order to obtain international recognition. In this respect, academic English, for the majority, means both an opportunity and a threat. The international community may get the chance to get to know the author and his or her work well. If not, the researcher and his or her work are, in a sense, deprived of this opportunity. Conversation without a common language between academicians from different nationalities, both in the virtual and real world, would prove impossible. In the modern world, English has become the language of not only science but also aviation, computing, diplomacy, and tourism. It is listed as the official or co-official language of over 42 countries and is spoken extensively in other countries where it has no official sta-

tus. English plays a great part in the cultural, political, or economic life of those countries. This compares to 27 for French, 20 for Spanish and 17 for Arabic. This domination is unique in history. We could argue that English is on its way to becoming the world's unofficial international language. Despite the fact that Chinese is spoken by far more people as a first language, English is now the most widespread of all the world's languages. There are identified three types of speakers using English: those who speak it as a first language (around 375 million speakers), those who speak it as second or additional language (again, some 375 million speakers), and those who learn it as a foreign language (about 750 million learners) identified the major domains of English as: (1) Working language of international organizations and conferences (2) Scientific publications (3) International banking, economic affairs and trade (4) Advertising for global brands (5) Audio-visual cultural products such as film, TV, popular music (6) International tourism (7) Tertiary (university) education (8) International safety (airline and maritime travels) (9) International law (10) as a "relay language" in interpretation and translation (11) Technology transfer (12) Internet communication.

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, which paved the way for Britain's economic predominance in the 19th century, the English language spread quickly all across the world. Then, the strong political and military predominance of the US after World War II made way for a substantial economic and cultural influence that displaced French from the sphere of diplomacy, and fixed English as the standard language for international communication. Thus, British colonialism in the 19th century and American capitalism and technological progress in the 20th century were undoubtedly the main causes for the spread of English throughout the world. Today, English is recognized as undoubtedly the most important language to learn for the increasingly mobile international community. This is a fact that seems to be irreversible. English has become the official language of the business and scientific world. Finally, English has become one of the most important academic and professional tools. It is increasingly recognized as, undoubtedly, the most important language to learn by the international community and as key to knowledge and world rich experiences. This is a fact that seems to be irreversible and undeniable. It has become the official language of the business and scientific world, although in academic and scientific communities, formal English usage is prevalent. However, it can be a threat to national languages and cultural heritages if it keeps influencing on national languages. National Languages are the valuable treasures which contains the cultural and historical values to be transferred to next generation.

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