

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



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The Decline in Investment

Economic stability is considered to be very important for the development of a country. It is believed that political and social stability depend on the economic prosperity. Without economic well-being it is very difficult to find a country with political might and social integrity. And, for strong economy, investment is the key. However, investment itself requires certain pre-requisites to flourish. Among them stability and security are the most vital ones. If these factors within a country are stable and reliable, the ground is said to be totally ready for the investors and businessmen to grow their businesses. All that the businessmen want is consistent outcome from their investments and, mostly, they dislike inconsistent and unreliable socio-political circumstances. The evil such as insecurity also plays a decisive role in disheartening businesses and investments. Different occurrences of terrorism and killings force the businesses to go out of business, and thus discourage the investors to invest. The societies victimized by insecurity do not have consumers going to the markets and enjoying the extravagance of shopping different products.

Afghanistan is also among the type of countries where insecurity and ambiguity have been influencing the economic life to a great extent. Both national and international businessmen are not eagerly prepared to invest in all the sectors and they do not see positive scenarios of their businesses. As insecurity and uncertainty have been devastatingly influencing the country, the development in the basic infra-structure has been scanty. The doubts and uncertainties of the Afghan market have made the international investors think thousand times before they take an initiative to start their businesses in the country. Though there are great opportunities in Afghanistan and the country is blessed with different types of minerals and other natural resources, the economic infra-structure has not been able to get enough attention. Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), in a recent report shows that investments have dropped considerably in Afghanistan since the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG) in 2014. AISA officials recently revealed that there has been a 26 percent fall in registration of new companies for investment during this period. Figures by AISA show that at least \$1 billion USD was invested in the country over the past two years while according to the organization, this amount was over \$2.2 billion USD during the same period under the previous government.

AISA information also shows that investment in Afghanistan's mining industry has experienced a 77 percent decrease, construction sector has witnessed 57 percent fall while energy and water sector has seen a 54 percent reduction over the past two years under the NUG. AISA's investment support director Masihullah Fakhri said that a lack of political and economic stability as well as insecurity have affected investments in Afghanistan. It is also important to note that there has not been a dedicated and serious effort by NUG to improve the situation. It has mostly been dominated by its inner conflicts and, therefore, could not dedicate enough attention to the economic issues and therefore, we have this situation facing us today.

Apart from that there are other factors as well that have been influencing the economic system of Afghanistan. The insufficient and unfavorable business laws are also one of the issues affecting Afghan economy. There have to be strong business laws governing the society and controlling the business. The laws should not only safeguard the rights of investors and businessmen but also make sure that the competition within the system is maintained on strong and fair footings. The evils like monopoly based on unfair competition must be tackled with properly and there should be strong bodies that control the prices within the markets, which at the present are non-existent and the businessmen are fixing the rates on their own. Afghanistan needs to have strong economy so as to survive in the post withdrawal era. The international aid and assistance that have been coming to the country for the last some years will be diminished and Afghan economy will be tested to a large extent. The country has to start from the basic infra-structure development and have to reach to a stable economy, wherein the businesses are able to function without any fear and inconsistency. An environment has to be developed that can be galvanizing for both the national and international investors. Moreover, the golden opportunities wherein Afghanistan can exert maximum and can get the best outcomes from must be discovered and they should be strengthened so as to push the country towards self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the businessmen and investors must also keep the national interests in their consideration while they establish their businesses and start getting the outcomes from them. They have to keep this in their minds that the society as a whole has certain rights that have to be fulfilled by them.

Crossing the Red Line

By Hujjatullah Zia

Three decades of war and violence have resulted in cultural erosion and moral decline in Afghanistan. The current culture is based either on secular mindset or radical ideology. A pure religious tenet seems to be at stake since secular and liberal norms are practiced in urban life and fundamental traditions hold strong sway in villages. Perhaps, the two conflicting practices stem from secular communist – a term which carries a negative meaning in Afghanistan – and radical Taliban. Due to different regimes, Afghanistan has fluctuated between secularism and radicalism for many years.

There is a wide cultural gap between urban and rural life. For instance, women encounter many traditional barriers in villages and sometimes treated with disdain, mainly in tribal belts. Similarly, they are flagellated or stoned in desert court without legal process and their freedom is restricted via patriarchal customs. In cities, however, women live a better life and have access to courts, Human Rights Commission and social activists to raise their voice in their favor. The rural and urban cultures are in direct conflicts.

The elders reveal a great nostalgia for the past culture which was based on religious tenets and ethical code. In the past, when western styles did not infiltrate our culture through advertising gimmicks, business show, films, internets, etc., people used to live a quiet life with a peace of mind. They were subject to the call of their conscience and safeguarded their dignity and beliefs against moral corruption. They neither exchanged their faith for lust or money nor their virtue for vice. Their voracious appetite for moral values and religiosity was reflected through their sound culture and social norms. They would protect their national values and cultural mores at the cost of their lives. For example, during the war against the former Soviet, Afghan nation made great sacrifices with a strong sense of brotherhood to protect their faith and national values. Therefore, the people fought bloody battles, with high morale, so as to prevent from cultural erosion. They preferred a glorious death to an ignominious life and chose martyrdom so as not to bow their heads before the next generations. In short, they invested in our national culture by their blood.

The current relative democracy in Afghanistan is the outcome of sacred jihad against the invaders – those who intended to humiliate Afghan nation. Our history keeps many heroic acts and national victories in its heart. The image of the 18-year-old Afghan national heroine Malalai of Maiwand, who rallied local people fighters against the British troops at the 1880 Battle of Maiwand, still haunts the mind of Afghan nation. Our history remem-

bers that when one of the Afghan leading flag-bearers fell from a British bullet, Malalai went forward and held up the flag singing heroic song as, "With a drop of my sweetheart's blood, shed in defense of the motherland, will I put a beauty spot on my forehead, such as would put to shame the rose in the garden." The blood of Malalai, a patriotic heroin, at the Battle of Maiwand was shed to protect national dignity and to assure democracy for the present generation. It is believed that the streams of blood, which were shed in battle fields for safeguarding the rights and dignity of individuals, now blossom freedom and democracy.

The nascent democracy was not obtained overnight. The blood of men, women and children forms the cornerstone of our freedom. Now, it should be noted that we are responsible before our previous and future generations. We should save the martyrs' blood through safeguarding our cultural values, religious tenets and ethical code. Similarly, we should hand down a pure culture, which is based on moral standards, to our next generations.

Fluctuating between secularism and radicalism is highly perilous and will put our culture and historical achievements at the mercy of erosion.

We are supposed to protect the cultural values which root in religious codes or moral standards and fight against the traditions which are based either on superstition, parochial mindsets, etc.

It is a great cause for concern to see that our culture is being merged into other cultures, both eastern and western like Indian, Turkish, European and American cultures, through movies and serials or simply through migrations. Our younger generation is highly vulnerable to cultural invasion.

A large number of youths, including male and female, have adopted theatrical and cinematic styles and fashions. For instance, the females' ponytail, penciled eyebrows, colored lips, miniskirt, tights and sandals remind you of fashion models or stage actresses – this scene is usually seen in cities. However, in some other corners of the country, women still use the old-fashioned burqa, a full covering with meshed face that Afghan women were forced to wear during the Taliban's regime, or confined within the four walls, mainly in tribal areas where traditions root in radical mindsets. It is believed that boundless freedom breeds moral corruption and strict restrictions may lead to violence – neither of them are based on religious tenets. Crossing the red line will have horrible consequence for the community and will result in cultural decline. Protecting cultural values is our moral obligation and we have to fulfill it in the best possible way.

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Air Pollution's True Costs

By Simon Upton

Air pollution takes years off people's lives. It causes substantial pain and suffering, among adults and children alike. And it damages food production, at a time when we need to feed more people than ever. This is not just an economic issue; it is a moral one.

Air pollution can be produced both outdoors and indoors. For the poorest families, indoor smog from coal- or dung-fired cooking stoves is typically the more serious problem. As economies develop and start to electrify, motorize, and urbanize, outdoor air pollution becomes the bigger issue.

Cleaner technologies are available, with the potential to improve air quality considerably. But policymakers tend to focus myopically on the costs of action, rather than the costs of inaction. With economic growth and rising energy demand set to fuel a steady rise in emissions of air pollutants and rapidly rising concentrations of particulate matter (PM) and ozone in the coming decades, this approach is untenable.

A new OECD report, The Economic Consequences of Outdoor Air Pollution, estimates that outdoor air pollution will cause 6-9 million premature deaths annually by 2060, compared to three million in 2010. That is equivalent to a person dying every 4-5 seconds. Cumulatively, more than 200 million people will die prematurely in the next 45 years as a result of air pollution.

There will also be more pollution-related illness. New cases of bronchitis in children aged 6-12 are forecast to soar to 36 million per year by 2060, from 12 million today. For adults, we predict ten million new cases per year by 2060, up from 3.5 million today. Children are also being increasingly affected by asthma. All of this will translate into more pollution-related hospital admissions, projected to rise to 11 million in 2060, from 3.6 million in 2010.

These health problems will be concentrated in densely populated areas with high PM concentrations, especially cities in China and India. In per capita terms, mortality is also set to reach high levels in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus region, and other parts of Asia, such as South Korea, where aging populations are highly vulnerable to air pollution.

The impact of air pollution is often discussed in dollar terms. By 2060, 3.75 billion working days per year could be lost due to the adverse health effects of dirty air – what economists call the "disutility of illness." The direct market impact of this pollution in terms of lower worker productivity, higher health spending, and lower crop yields, could exceed 1% of GDP, or \$2.6 trillion, annually by 2060.

Massive as they are, however, the dollar figures do not reflect the true costs of air pollution. Premature deaths from breathing in small particles and toxic gases, and the pain and suffering from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, do not have a market price. Nor does the experience of constantly inhaling foul-smelling air, or forcing your child to wear a face mask just to play outside. These burdens weigh far more heavily on people than any price tag can represent.

Nonetheless, the truth remains that policymakers tend to respond more to hard figures than to abstract experiences. So the OECD examined myriad economic studies on air pollution to quantify what people's health is worth to them.

On average, individuals would be prepared to pay around \$30 to reduce their annual risk of dying prematurely by one in 100,000. Using well-established techniques, these "willingness-to-pay" figures were converted into an overall value of premature deaths caused by outdoor air pollution, as illustrated, for example, in the OECD's Mortality Risk Valuation in Environment, Health and Transport Policies.

By that measure, the global cost of premature deaths caused by outdoor air pollution would reach a staggering \$18-25 trillion a year by 2060.

Arguably, this is not "real" money, as the costs are not related to any market transactions. But it does reflect the value people put on their very real lives – and the value they would put on policies that would help to delay their very real deaths.

It is time for governments to stop fussing about the costs of efforts to limit air pollution and start worrying about the much larger costs of allowing it to continue unchecked. Their citizens' lives are in their hands. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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