

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



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How to Avoid the Worst Scenario in Afghanistan

The 9th round of the US-Taliban peace talks is underway in Qatari capital. According to the political analysts, they will soon reach a deal; based on this deal the two sides will end the war in Afghanistan, the longest war of the US. After that, the Intra-Afghan talks will start in Oslo of Norway. It is expected that in the Oslo talks representatives of the Afghan government, Afghan political parties, Civil Society Organizations and Taliban will take part to discuss the future of the country. The Intra-Afghan discussions are the most crucial phase of the Afghan peace talks. Afghan representatives will decide about future of the country; it means that a fair deal between the Afghan government and Taliban can protect the current constitution, religious, ethnic and gender basic rights in Afghanistan. To achieve this, we need to form a strong negotiations team who is committed to the Afghanistan national interests, believes in democratic values and considers the basic rights of the citizen as a redline of the talks.

Role of the US and International Community in the Intra-Afghan talks

It seems that the US and international community will act as mediators. They will pave the way for Intra-Afghan talks and will accept any decision they may make about the type of government and other Afghan internal issues; it means that democracy is not an issue for the US and international community in Afghanistan anymore. The US will not act as a close Afghan strategic partner in the Intra-Afghan talks. It is evident that the US and its allies have come to Afghanistan for their security concerns, not to institutionalize democracy in the country.

Role of Afghan Media in Protecting Democratic Values

Afghan media can play a vital role in democracy only if there is an enabling environment that allows them to do so. They shall improve their skills and take the risks for the kind of in-depth reporting that a new democracy requires. Afghan Media independence shall be guaranteed and it requires media organizations to be financially viable, free from intervention of media owners and the state, and operate in a competitive environment. Afghan media should also be accessible to as wide a segment of society as possible. All Efforts to help the Afghan media should be directed toward: the protection of press rights, enhancing media accountability, building media capacity and democratizing media access. Considering Taliban's background in terms of freedom of speech, Afghan media will be both the main front of war against fundamentalism and deepening democracy in the country.

The Worst Scenario likely if we are not vigilant

If we analyze the military and political behavior of Taliban, we would conclude that the group neither has changed its military nor its political behavior. They continue torching the schools, especially girls' schools, lashing women, killing innocent people, attacking mosques and other public areas and cooperating with other terrorist groups. In terms of political behavior, they insist on Emirate system and oppose the republicanism. Many political observers believe that, a peace deal with the US is a tactical approach of Taliban. They do this deal to make the US leave Afghanistan. However, they will gradually try resume fighting with other Afghan factions to capture all parts of the country. Considering the background of Afghan political parties deals, there is nearly no deal that has lasted for a long time. Peshawar agreement in 1992 is one of the good examples of such agreements. Afghan political leaders agreed on a road map in Peshawar; however, it was broken soon and Kabul was destroyed by them.

The US and Afghan peace talks will soon lead to an agreement between the two parties. What matters now for the US is reaching a deal that guarantees Taliban will prevent other terrorist groups to attack the US and its allies' national interests. The issue of democracy is not a matter of concern for the US and its allies in Afghanistan anymore. Then, the Intra-Afghan talks will start with the participation of the Afghan government, political leaders and Civil Society Organizations. Now, defending the republicanism and democratic values is the duty of Afghanistan delegation. It depends to this delegation how it acts in a unified manner against the Taliban in order to preserve and protect the democratic values that can ensure a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

Social Change; A Duty Calling All of Us

By: S. Mary

Achievements in life are difficult to attain. In order to make achievements in life, it is necessary for an individual to have the urge and the iron will. Without having the urge and the motivation, achieving anything worthwhile would be really difficult. Same is true for a nation; unless a nation has the urge to do something positive it would be really difficult for society to make developments and improvements.

A nation keeps on moving with the pace of time unless it realizes that there are shortcomings in its way of living and there are problems that are needed to be concentrated upon and eliminated. In fact, the very first step in eradicating a problem is realizing that the problem does exist and it has to be solved. Considering a problem something very normal and making adjustments with it is a serious error and must be avoided in any case.

The people in Afghanistan are also having the attitude of making compromises with their social and political problems. They, instead of considering them a hurdle towards evolution of the society and designing efforts to overcome them, change themselves to go ahead with the problems untouched. For example, one of the most serious problems that Afghan society is facing today is corruption and the tragedy is that it is getting more threatening with each passing day. The Afghans must realize that this issue is generating disorder in almost all the spheres of life and there must be an urge to take measures to curb it. Unfortunately, the people strive to compensate with it and in the process further strengthen its roots.

It is believed that becoming part of an evil and not taking actions against it, in fact, means favoring the evil and supporting it to nurture further. Every person in our society just wants to live for his own self and would never concentrate on any problem that would affect society as a whole. He thinks that dragging himself out of any unpleasant situation would solve the issues but, as a matter of fact, it does not. We need to realize that we have to play an active role in the society and that is only possible when we have the feeling that there is always room for improvement and the status quo needs to be changed. We require being proactive and must fulfill the responsibility of a vigilant nation.

It is also one of the most demanding requirements of de-

mocracy. In a democracy, it is vital that the people must be active and ready to participate in the affairs of the country. Their inputs in different forms are vital for the evolution of the society as a whole. The responsibilities of the people are not only limited to casting votes, but they extend to keeping eyes on the actions and policies of the government and criticize or encourage them as per the requirement.

In the current scenario in Afghanistan, particularly, in the ongoing political arena, the role of the people is significant. This is the time that is going to decide the future of the country. The leaders and their steps must be checked, and they should be held accountable for them. They should not feel that they can use the authority, which has been bestowed to them by the will of the people, in any way they want. They must be scrutinized so that they should feel pressurized and, at the same time, responsible.

Afghan media and civil society can also play a dominant role in this regard. They need to provide current and timely information to the people and guide them towards informed decision making and active civil life. They have to disseminate to the people the message that their fates cannot be decided in secretive conference room, behind closed doors. People must feel that that they are being informed and they are being given proper opportunity to make important decisions for their country.

Thus, every change within a society starts with an urge or realization that a change is required. It is then further strengthened through consistent efforts. These efforts must be ensured through active participation within social and political life. It is also a democratic norm to be vigilant and participatory in a socio-political sphere. This can also support in keeping an eye on a country's leadership. However, it is also vital that the democratic institutions must play their part in democratization of the society, and the nourishment of the individuals into responsible social and democratic beings. Democracy is not only an ideology that can be implemented on a particular people or nation; rather, it is a complete way of life that must be nourished through civil education, and that demands that the people of words must convert to the people of action for bringing better changes and blocking the negative ones.

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Social Policy Starts at Home

By: Shahra Razavi

Political economy has come a long way. Many figures and institutions that have long embraced neoliberalism increasingly recognize the failures of markets and acknowledge that states may have a role to play in improving socioeconomic outcomes. Even the International Monetary Fund now discusses the "macro-criticality" of social protection, the need for progressive taxation, and, potentially, universal transfers.

But the conversation - which focuses almost exclusively on coordination between state and market - remains too narrow to produce effective solutions. For that, as a new report by UN Women shows, social factors - especially the role of families and gender equality - must also be included.

These two factors are inextricably linked, with gender inequalities being heavily reinforced by family dynamics, in a way that, say, racial inequalities are not. The problem is compounded by the fact that outdated assumptions about families and gender dynamics continue to shape social and economic policymaking.

As it stands, only about one-third of all households adhere to the "ideal" family structure (two parents with children) on which policies are typically based. Among the two-thirds that take a different form, a large share are extended households, which include, for example, aunts, uncles, or grandparents. About a quarter of all households are either single-parent or single-person.

Moreover, while marriage remains virtually universal in some parts of the world, it is becoming less common in others, with even long-term partners often choosing to cohabit before or instead of getting married. In some countries in Latin America, Southern Africa, and Europe, up to three-quarters of women aged 25-29 who are in relationships are cohabiting with their partners.

All of this has important policy implications. Given their greater longevity, women over 60 are twice as likely as men of the same age group to be living on their own, often subsisting on a meager pension and/or little, if any, savings.

Furthermore, single-parent households - more than three-quarters of which are headed by single mothers - are, on average, twice as likely as dual-parent households to be living in poverty. Single parents often struggle to balance paid work with their care responsibilities.

But even in dual-parent and higher-income households, women face significant challenges in juggling paid work and unpaid care work. Globally, women perform over 76% of unpaid caregiving, on average - more than three times as much as men.

This significantly reduces women's access to independent income. Only about half of married or cohabiting women aged 25-54 are in the labor force, compared to nearly all married or cohabiting men. And whereas the presence of young children in the household decreases women's employment rates, it increases that of men.

An independent income strengthens women's bargaining power, enables them to exit abusive relationships, and provides security in old age. Moreover, the share of women earning an independent income is inversely correlated to the share of households in poverty. As the Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen put it, "The single most effective remedy against poverty is maternal employment."

To enhance women's economic autonomy, the first priority must be to invest in care systems, including early childhood education and care (ECEC). This is particularly urgent in developing countries, where the gap between the supply of childcare services and demand for such services is largest, owing to the relatively small childcare workforce.

Beyond enabling women to pursue economic opportunities, quality, affordable childcare helps to fuel job creation (within the care sector) and build human capital (particularly among the children who benefit from it). Given this - as well as the time commitment that paid work represents for all genders - such investment is needed even if unpaid work is more equally shared within households.

A second key priority must be to deliver comprehensive social protections, including paid leave - which enables parents to care for children without becoming disconnected from the labor market - and income support. Family benefits, such as childcare allowances, mitigate the heightened risk of poverty that accompanies childrearing. Single parents should receive additional support.

Meanwhile, universal pensions can support women - who are likely to have fewer savings and assets than men, but live longer - in old age. The establishment of accessible long-term care services and reform of marital-property regimes would also help. Finally, to protect women's rights to joint assets, social benefits, and child custody, family laws and social policies must recognize cohabitation, rather than just marriage.

By designing a policy package around the needs of contemporary families, political leaders can promote women's rights, children's development, and employment. The same policies would therefore be a boon to economic dynamism and poverty reduction.

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