

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



December 19, 2017

International Migrants Day

Yesterday, i.e. December 18 was celebrated as International Migrants Day in different parts of the world. This day is celebrated each year to highlight the issues of the migrants and the requirement of better policies so that migration may result in better opportunities for both the countries of origin and countries of destination. The day also emphasizes that the fundamental rights of all the migrants must be considered important and measures must be carried out to protect them in every possible manner.

The day was first proclaimed on December 4, 2000. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), considering the increasing number of migrants around the world, announced that December 18 would be celebrated each year as International Migrants day. December 18 was chosen because it was the day when, in 1990, UNGA had adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. This year the theme of the day was, "Safe Migration in a World on the Move." Since globalization has set the world on the move, the challenges regarding migration and migrants seem to be on the rise. Therefore, there is a need to create circumstance and design policies that may benefit both the origin of the migrants and their destination. However, for that to happen, there must be determined and committed effort from the world as a whole, particularly, from the developed nations of the world.

Migration has always been an issue for Afghanistan. Different eras of instability have forced millions of people to leave their homeland and move to the neighboring countries and other countries, mostly Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. After the downfall of Taliban and installation of a so-called democratic government, there were some opportunities that the situation could improve and the conditions in the country could get better and people would ultimately return to their country. Regrettably, with an intensification in insecurity people do not appear to be very much confident about the future and many people who have already migrated hesitate to come back and many of those who are in the country are planning to leave for better future.

Those who decide to migrate are caught in different sorts of problems; nevertheless, they are ready to take the risks and leave their homes. The have to undergo different problems on the way to their destinations as most of the times they have to follow illegal means. They have to face human smugglers, cross borders illegally, face different weather conditions and travel across mountains, rivers and even sea. There have been different incidents when the migrants have lost their lives on these routes. On many occasions, Afghan migrants lost their lives in the waters of Greece on their route to Europe or in Indonesian and Australian waters. This clearly depicts that people do not take decisions to migrate because of economic conditions, alone; rather, they do so mostly because of the security conditions. Lately, the migrants include many individuals from media and different offices, who having observed the situation in the country closely, opted to flee. Therefore, it is no more the issue of ignorance or tough economic conditions as the decisions are taken by well-educated individuals who are educated and even have jobs.

Unfortunately, the ones who reach other countries after myriads of problems are not guaranteed secure future. As the issue of refugees has become very serious many countries are not sure about allowing refugees in their countries. Particularly, European countries, after facing a flux of refugees are already deporting many Afghan refugees. Germany that initially welcomed refugees is also in the process to deport many of Afghan refugees to their country. Same is the case with other European countries.

Moreover, the policies and procedures regarding the cases of different refugee in European countries have also changed to a great extent. There are many Afghan refugees in European countries who have been waiting for the final decision about their cases and in the meanwhile are not in a condition to move freely, earn livelihood and travel to different places and or meet their family members. Even in the neighboring countries, Afghan refugees have not always been welcomed with warm hugs; every now and then they have been the victims of discrimination and ill-treatment. Most of the Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries, especially in Iran and Pakistan have suffered the consequences of fluctuations in the way they are treated. Definitely, it has been generous of both the countries to compensate the Afghan refugees, who because of wars and instability left their dear homeland, but on certain occasions they have also displayed the attitude that have violated the rights of the refugees to a great extent.

Definitely, these countries have their own problems; they are developing countries and they have their own economic issues to face; however, they have been supported by international community and United Nations to assist the refugees and guarantee their rights under international law. Both the European and neighboring countries at this crucial juncture must make sure that they design a clear strategy regarding the fate of Afghan refugees. Definitely, there are political and diplomatic concerns for all the governments of the world to consider, but the issue of refugees is more important than such concerns, as it involves the precious human lives.



Winter – The Hell of the Poor

By Hujjatullah Zia

The poor are left at the mercy of cold weather in Afghanistan. There are many poor men and women who seek to survive the cold winter. It will not be an exaggeration to call winter the hell of the poor since they suffer severely. The winter is a thorn in the side of the poor across the country and inflict heavy sufferings upon them.

I am constantly touched with the pain and anguish of poor men and women who sit on streets from the break of dawn to the fall of dusk, in this cold weather, to earn a penny. Afghan widows, who have probably lost their spouses in battlefield or terrorist attacks, beseech passersby to hand them a penny so that they could save their children from hunger and coldness. If you walk in Kabul streets, you will see a large number of women sitting with burqa (a head-to-toe covering) and unfolding their problems with passersby. Mostly, they say that their children are left without food and clothing. There are women who walk with a cane beg on the streets.

On the other hand, there are scores of children either begging or selling minor stuff such as plastic, mobile card, chewing gum, etc. Although it is time for them to play joyfully with their childhood friends and go to school without worrying about financial issues, they are forced to engage in labor and daily chores to provide their families with a morsel of bread. They might be the children of soldiers, who sacrificed their lives in battlefields, or war victims. Those who are killed for the protection of national values are forgotten by the public and government. Only their families are left with indescribable pain and sufferings.

There are countless of people in Afghanistan who do not have a roof over their heads. If you pass Pole-Sokhta in Kabul, you will see many addicted individuals who suffer in the worst possible way. It is believed that extreme poverty and unemployment forced them to seek solace in narcotic drug. Rather than being sympathized, they have been changed into fun for the public. People go to Pole-Sokhta to watch the misery of some others who were forced to the quagmire of drug. The question is that what is the government's attitude toward them?

The government turns a close eye to the addicted individuals. Ironically, the only responsibility the officials feel toward them is to bury the addicts who die out of pain and disease. Those addicts mostly die in winter as a result of coldness. Rather than treating them as patients, policemen humiliate and punch them every once in a while. A picture of an addict, who resided Pole-Sokhta, went viral when he was killed by the punching of a policeman. Only few days ago,

I passed Pole-Sokhta in an early morning and saw the dead body of an addict beside the road. People were passing him with indifference. I was shocked to see how death is changed into an ordinary issue in the country and no one feels sorry for him. Hence, addicts die a silent death and buried with disgust in Afghanistan. Do you not think that humanity is moribund?

It should be noted that they are also citizens of this country and deserve to be helped by the government. The government will have to build a hospital for the addicts and treat them. If they are treated, they will be ready to work in companies or even serve in the army. In this case, it will be an honor for them to die in battles against terrorists rather than dying in a corner of a street. After all, treating them will also mitigate crime and corruption in the country. Almost all those addicts are involved in crime. They will succumb to corruption to survive poverty and hunger. So, treating them will benefit the society.

It is further believed that if poverty and unemployment do not be dealt with, the graph of crime and corruption will increase. Meanwhile, many other youths and children will also resort to using narcotic drug to alleviate their mental pressure. Poverty generates many kinds of crime and corruption, including moral corruption.

The fact is that officials live a luxury life and their families are well-off and their children do not feel any problems. They concentrate all their attention on their own families and forget other citizens. In such a case, they may not feel responsibility toward those who are afflicted with great misery and lack basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. They are not touched with the grief and sorrow of widows or orphans. In the current era, humanity and ethical code are eroding and one is not aware of the pain of their next-door neighbor. People have turned extremely selfish and turn a close eye to the hardship of their fellows. To be honest, altruism and moral values have reduced to mere slogans and the vacuum of humanity is widely felt in human societies. The poor are humiliated and made fun of rather than being supported. The government ought to pay attention to the citizens' challenges and create jobs for both men and women so as to mitigate poverty. If unemployment is not dealt with, poverty will continue unabated. Moreover the families that have lost their bread-winners in battlefields or terrorist attacks, should be supported by the government. Their children must be given privileges in schools, universities, and educational centers so that they could continue their education.

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Making the Most of the Brexit Deal

A chaotic Brexit, in which key questions about the relationship between the UK and the EU are left unanswered, may be avoided, but severe political and economic harm could still await both sides. What, then, accounts for the evident lack of urgency in taking the necessary steps to avoid such a scenario?

By Jean Pisani-Ferry

On December 8, the United Kingdom and the European Union's 27 members settled on some key aspects of the Brexit divorce agreement, opening the way for the decision, on December 15, to open a new chapter in negotiations, focused on addressing the future EU-UK relationship and transitional arrangements. This is good news, not least because it averts the worst-case scenario: a hard Brexit. But what lies ahead is much more challenging.

It seemed for some time that Europe would sleepwalk into hard Brexit. With the UK's ruling Conservative Party deeply divided, and the EU seemingly unwilling to act strategically, the likelihood of a no-deal cliff-edge scenario appeared high.

Yet, in the end, the UK made critical concessions that allowed the negotiations to move forward. It agreed to pay much more to its EU partners than it had initially announced. And it committed to avoid the establishment of a hard border between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and the Republic of Ireland (part of the EU), even as Northern Ireland retains full access to the British market. The deal is a bitter pill to swallow for those who campaigned for Brexit in the name of saving money for the UK's National Health Service. They will find it hard to tell voters that settling existing commitments to the EU will cost each British adult €1,000 (\$1,189), if not more. And the latter-day Leninists who regarded Brexit as a way to complete the policy agenda initiated by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will find it hard to reconcile their vision of a deregulated Britain with the continued alignment of Northern Ireland's regulatory regime with that of the EU.

But the fact is that a hard Brexit would have cost both the UK and the EU far more, in terms of jobs and prosperity. Even the threat of such an outcome was starting to cause damage, as private companies put investment on hold. The political consequences of a hard Brexit would have been dire as well. Both the UK and the EU would have lost substantial global influence at a moment when an erratic US administration is seeking to tear down the existing international order and an assertive Chinese leadership is beginning to use that effort to its own advantage.

Had the UK not acted to avoid such a scenario it would have lost the most, especially if it had ended up relying on a crumbling multilateral trade system to ensure access to foreign markets. In any case, because geography matters, the EU will remain Britain's main market. And, because size matters, the UK will continue to depend on EU regulations, especially in services.

But averting a hard Brexit is just the first step. The question now is what sort of future relationship the two sides can agree on. And the answer is far from clear.

On the British side, the absence of a coherent vision for the future UK-EU relationship is astonishing. Prime Minister Theresa May's speech in Florence in September remains the closest approximation on offer, but it left many important questions without a clear answer. And, as May's legislative defeat in the House of Commons on December 13 underscored, the British government remains too divided to agree on a common Brexit agenda.

There is not much vision on the EU side, either. With the recent deal, Michel Barnier, the bloc's chief negotiator, scored a tactical victory. But a template for future partnership is still nowhere to

be found. The guidelines for Brexit negotiations issued last April by the EU's heads of state and government certainly did not provide one. Instead, they established red lines, emphasizing the "indivisibility" of the "four freedoms" – free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor – that underpin the European single market. The December 15 declaration does not go much further.

For now, the EU's negotiating stance continues to be shaped largely by the fear that too favorable an agreement would create incentives for other countries to follow the UK's lead. Beyond that defensive attitude, lack of policy consensus has resulted in a preference for the status quo.

Policy wonks focus on weighing a "Canada option" (a free-trade agreement for goods) against a "Norway option" (a sort of junior membership in the single market). But both are unsuited to the UK-EU partnership. The Canada option would not address any of the fundamental issues concerning trade in services – a critical omission, given that the UK is a major supplier, and their provision requires a complex regulatory framework. And the Norway option would simply assume away the problem by requiring Britain to adopt passively any economic legislation adopted by the EU.

In a 2016 paper, my colleagues and I argued that the EU should regard Brexit as an opportunity to define a new model for partnership with countries that want strong economic and security links, without political integration. We further argued that, at a time when enlargement momentum has been depleted, the EU should work to diversify its relationships with neighbors. We proposed building a "continental partnership" involving deep economic integration based on a common regulatory framework, with the EU, the UK, and possibly others accepting the free movement of goods, services, and capital, but not of labor. We also argued in favor of a permanent process of policy consultation that would, as a counterpart to the UK's submission to EU economic rules, give the British a voice – but no vote – in the creation of European economic legislation.

In official EU circles, the paper was received coldly, to say the least, with critics deriding the breach of the four freedoms. But the fact is that, while an integrated market for goods and services requires a degree of labor mobility, it does not imply that all people must have the right to cross borders and look for a job in the country of their choice. To pretend that it does is to confuse a citizen's right (essential, to be sure, in a political and social community like the EU) with an economic necessity. This is bad economics and dubious politics. Our critics also resisted envisioning a longer-term arrangement before the details of the divorce were settled. But this chapter is now being closed, meaning that it is time for the EU to think outside the box, and make an ambitious offer to Britain.

Any sensible agreement between the EU and the UK is bound to result in the latter losing much of the influence it currently enjoys in European affairs – an outcome that will surely diminish the appeal of following its lead. But even if a current EU member does decide it would be better off outside the EU's "inner circle," it is not the end of the world. It certainly isn't a reason to cling to the status quo. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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