

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



December 30, 2018

Closing the Gap Between Classes

A glance at Afghan society will clearly depict that there is a marked division between the rich and the poor. This division has existed for a long period in Afghan history. When the society was overwhelmingly tribal and feudal and was led by monarchy, the situation was no different. The king, his relatives, the landlords, and tribal heads had most of the authority and power by dint of their wealth, while the poor people, mostly farmers, had to face lack of resources, wealth and ultimately power.

The situation has not improved much even in today's Afghanistan. Though, the country is said to be democratic, it still remains tribal to a large extent. And, more unfortunate is the fact that the socio-political setup has not changed much in its essence. There have been certain changes in the appearance or the attire but the infra-structure still remains the same.

Afghan society can be easily divided into two classes, factions or strata, whatever they are named. There are marked differences between both the classes and they can be easily observed. A very dominant and clear line can be drawn between them and the gap between them can be observed conveniently. Ill-fatedly, that gap seems to be getting wider with each passing day.

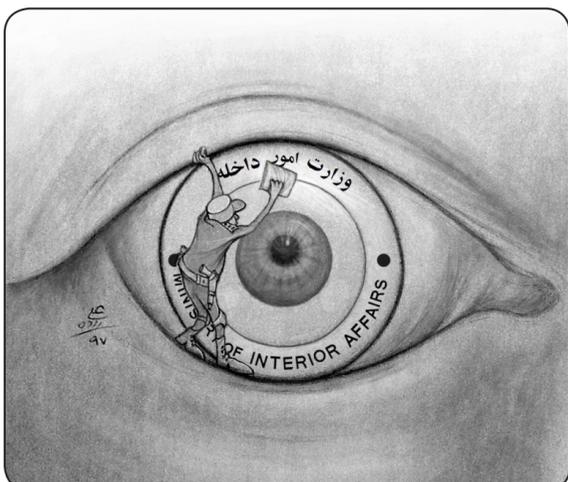
The intervention of international community, though changed Afghan society to certain extent, it could not bring about real change. In fact, it further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The wealth that poured in the country for assistance and help could only find the rich people waiting for them. Therefore, they made sure that it did not reach the poor and deserving masses and made sure to strengthen their position with its support. This intensification in inequality can be easily observed in different parts of the country. For example, in capital Kabul, through cursory observation one can find the unevenness in the so-called development – poor and muddy houses can be easily observed in the shadows of tall buildings and in similar fashion various groups of poor children can be found running after or beside luxury cars for alms.

Apart from that, its manifestations can be found in various other ways as well. Just consider the way the law and order system treat the people. There is a marked difference between how the rich people are treated by it, and how the poor are victimized. Those among the rich who might have earned all their earnings through illegal means, can easily avoid any sort of punishment by law enforcement agencies. They can threaten the police, dodge them or even bribe them. They can even buy the decisions of the courts in their favor. There is no way they can be punished. If they have no other way, they can even escape easily from the country. While there are many poor people, who might have not done any crime or may have committed small crimes so as to fulfill the overgrowing necessities of life, to serve their families or to find some morsels of food can be caught easily, and more easily can they be punished. Thus justice has itself become the will of the rich.

This division is not a natural phenomenon. There can be rich and poor in a society but in Afghanistan they have reached to the extreme. There are extremely rich and poor people and the gap between them is ever widening. This generates injustice and also a sense of dispossession. The ones who are deprived, who are intentionally kept away from the facilities and treated in the worst possible manner, will become nonconformist. They will definitely rise against the government and against the system. They know that they would not be provided the deserving rights; therefore, they will opt for illegal means and will thus generate many social evils.

There should be necessary measures to curb the situation. First, it should be made sure that justice should be maintained in its true spirit, i.e. it must not favor only the upper class; rather the upper class itself should be treated by the law and order system in the same way as the other classes. To put it in simpler terms it can be said that social stratification should not be changed to social injustice.

Second, social mobility should be made smoother in our society. For example, it should not be very difficult for a person taking birth in a lower class to work hard, develop the capability and move to the middle and even to upper class. There should be equal opportunities for almost all the members of the society to excel in their lives and become rich. The reverse should be maintained as well, i.e. the people born in rich families but not working hard should be pushed to the lower strata. Social mobility should be able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.



Afghanistan and Challenges to Access the Seaports

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As a landlocked country, Afghanistan needs to use the seaports of neighboring countries for its export and import activities when dealing with Arab, European and American countries. Thereon, the closest Afghanistan route to the international water is Karachi port. Abdul Kabir Samimi, a professor of economics at the Kabul University, writes: "Pakistan has used the transit route as an instrument of economic and political pressure against Afghanistan, and so it can be said that the socio-economic and sometimes the political situation of Afghanistan is in the hostage of Pakistan; even sometimes they orders which kind of goods are allowed import to Afghanistan and which types are banned! Pakistan has always tried to restrict Afghanistan's trade relations with neighboring countries, especially Iran and India. For this reason, the entry of Indian merchandise through Pakistan's land to Afghanistan is often sanctioned due to political reason.

It is said that Afghanistan's market is exclusively under the control of Pakistan. However, this monopoly have challenged in recent years with implementation of several strategic plan from the North. Before, they did not only control over the transit roads to Afghanistan but also governed the whole situation of the Afghan economy as they wish. Pakistani officials have consistently rejected these claims saying that they have always cooperated with Afghanistan. For example, Pakistani Trade Minister Homayoun Akhtar, on December 12, 2005, made it clear that Pakistan has no consideration to trade between Afghanistan and Other countries of the South Asian countries. Pakistan would provide the necessary transit facilities for any kind of regional cooperation. Nevertheless, Pakistan's sabotage is not something hidden in practice and their behavior is completely against the transit laws about the landlocked countries. In regard to Pakistan's opposition to importing quality and lower price goods from India and Iran to Afghanistan, a Pakistani economist, Rahil Khan, said in an interview with the Pajhwok News Agency "if Pakistan allows a smooth transitions via its lands to Afghanistan, it will inflict up to 1 billion\$ loss to the economy of Pakistan." Whereas, Afghanistan extremely needs to import agricultural machines, spare parts, tractors, etc., to develop agricultural industry in Afghanistan. One of the common complain that repeatedly heard from national traders and local media is that the Pakistani border police keep containers of imported Afghan goods for several months at the port of Karachi just for security pretexts. This causes a lot of issues such as perish of goods, shortage of goods and rise in prices in Afghan market; in addition, it does not allow the goods to reach the customers at the right time. Accordance with International trade law, the landlocked countries

have certain rights and privilege to use the seaports located at their neighborhoods. The host countries should provide facilities for the transportation of imported and exported goods at low cost. It is not clear how much this right is respected in other countries but regarding Afghanistan, it can be said with certainty that there has always been uproar over that right.

Given the fact that the ports of Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan, Chabahar and Bandar Abbas in Iran are the closest place to Afghanistan, Afghanistan uses these four ports to import and export its merchandise. After the goods are evacuated in the above ports, the imported goods are transported to domestic destination but in recent years the Afghanistan's need for these ports has changed to its serious weak points. Instead of being used as mere mercantile activities free from political orientation, it quickly switched to a political phase. Consequently, the politicization approach not only harms the regional cooperation but also undermine the practical value of international economic rights and law considered for the landlocked countries.

When our neighboring countries meet their political goals and interests through Afghanistan, they facilitate transportation from these ports but when political relations knot with ifs and buts, they block the exports and imports of Afghan goods from these ports. For example, few years ago the prohibition of tankers transfer from Iran was accompanied by a lot of mass protests and intense verbal conflicts between the authorities of both countries. In relation with Pakistan, Afghanistan has been facing the greatest challenges over a period of at least past 70 years. At the time of Daud Khan, the problem of the Karachi port was one of the hot political and economic problems of the country. Pakistan even closed the port of Karachi and Gwadar to communist governments. During the presidency of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, the situation again continued with serious ups and downs.

Some experts believe that permission of the neighboring countries to use its port is conditional on the rehabilitation of the sea site; after the construction, they may be ready to sign a formal agreement for its uses which means this permission is issued solely for the purpose of exploitation. Anyway, our government needs to use its active diplomacy to find a sustained solution for the long and worrisome issue; in addition, the government should peruse the strategic transit plan which is vital for nullifying the monopoly of a certain country. If Afghanistan fails to solve the transit issues through active diplomacy and support of international partners, the traders will remain deprived from lucrative regional and international markets and their business activities will always be affected by the regional political tensions. Moreover, the businessmen will be compelled to imports its goods at a higher cost through neighboring markets.

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Nature vs. Infrastructure

By: Maxwell Gomera

In November 2017, scientists working in Sumatra, Indonesia, made an exciting announcement: they had discovered a new species of orangutan, bringing to seven the number of great ape species globally.

But one year later, the only home of the 800 wild Tapanuli orangutans is being cleared for a \$1.6 billion dam and hydroelectric power plant. Although the project will contribute less than 1% of the country's planned generating capacity, scientists say it will lead to the extinction of this rare species. This raises, once again, a key question: what is nature worth?

Indonesia is not alone in making environmentally detrimental trade-offs. The twenty-first century will be a period of unprecedented infrastructure expansion, and a staggering \$90 trillion will be spent over the next 15 years to build or replace dams, power plants, and other facilities. In fact, more infrastructure will be built over the next decade and a half than currently exists. Naturally, habitats will be disrupted in the process.

And yet, environmentally reckless growth is not preordained; it is possible to make smart, sustainable choices. To do so, we must recognize the true value of nature, and make environmental ethics and cost-benefit analyses part of every project.

At the moment, this is not happening; most infrastructure is planned and constructed on the basis of market assessments that fail to account for nature. As a result, the world is facing a growing crisis: the weakening of ecosystem services – such as clean water, flood defense, and bee pollination – that protect biodiversity and form the foundation on which human welfare depends.

To change the status quo, we must make an ethical choice not to expose critical habitats and "natural capital" to greater danger – regardless of the possible economic returns. Just as most of the world has rejected the use of slave or child labor, the permanent destruction of nature must be repudiated.

Some economists have recognized this by building environmental costs into their arguments; the Amazon rainforest is a case in point. There, deforestation has reduced the production of vapor clouds that are essential to transporting rain across South America. The drought that parched São Paulo between 2014 and 2017 is believed to have been caused, at least in part, by the absence of these "flying rivers." As the Brazilian climate scien-

tist Antonio Nobre has noted, if these aerial water pumps are permanently turned off, an area that accounts for 70% of South America's gross national product would be turned into desert. Of course, identifying critical natural capital is challenging, especially at smaller scales. While many can agree on the importance of protecting the Amazon, it is harder to demonstrate the value of preserving orangutans in Indonesia. But, over time, loss of the Tapanuli orangutan's habitat would profoundly change the composition of the rainforest and disrupt its ecological services. At the same time, the elimination of a species of great ape – our closest kin – would erase an opportunity to understand better our own evolution and genetics.

In the developed world, some governments and businesses are making the ethical choice by applying the "precautionary principle" to growth. Adopted in 1992 as part of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the principle embodies the conclusion that it is wiser – and ultimately cheaper – to avoid environmental degradation in the first place.

The real challenge is to instill this ethos in developing economies, where the bulk of future infrastructure spending will occur. Consider highway development. By 2050, there will be 15.5 million miles of new paved roads, enough to circle the Earth more than 600 times. More than 90% of this fresh pavement will be laid in developing countries, which already face huge environmental pressure. In the Amazon region, for example, there are nearly 53,000 mining leases encompassing 21% of the basin's land mass. In Guinea, a World Bank-supported dam is reportedly threatening a key chimpanzee sanctuary. And in Tanzania, the government has approved a dam and hydroelectric plant in the Selous Game Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With human needs increasing as populations and incomes grow, there are legitimate reasons to build more infrastructure. But if current trends continue, short-term interests will strip away the natural assets on which all life depends. To plan for smart development, governments and business must recognize nature's role in supporting economic activity and ensuring ecological and human health. After all, we do not – and cannot – live in a world where nature has no value.

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