

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



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Unrestrained Violence against Women

It is really tragic to note that there has not been any stoppage to the incidents of violence against women in Afghanistan and every now and then we come across different news items that reveal the fact that violence against women is really getting very serious and if there are no immediate actions taken, the situation may get out of the hands. It is also vital to note that the incidents that are able to be highlighted in media are only a small percentage of the overall situation of violence against women in different parts of the country. There are many instances of violence against women in the remote areas of the country that never come out of the houses or the villages; they are born in closed houses, remain there in oblivion and die without anyone knowing about them. Or even if somebody comes to know about them, they think it wiser to keep them hidden.

One of the reasons that Afghan society has not been able to play any dominant role to counter violence against women is that the incidents that come to light are not pursued with true zeal and determination. The outcome is that the culprits easily run away from the justice and this gives the impression and the message that they can keep on doing what they do.

If such cases are pursued properly and the culprits are brought to justice, there will be clear message for everyone to be careful while they intend to make a mistake of starting violence against women. However, it does not happen in Afghanistan and the result is that every day we listen heartbreaking news of different incidents of violence against women.

Yesterday it was reported that a man in the northern province of Balkh chopped off his wife's ears and ran away. The wife, Zarina 21, who is undergoing treatment at Balkh Hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif, told that her husband cut off her ears in an act of domestic violence on Monday night. She said in a statement, "My husband always treats me badly. I wasn't even allowed to visit my parents. He is a very suspicious man and often accused me of talking to strange men when I went to visit my parents."

Zarina called on Afghan legal and judicial institutions to arrest her husband and to ensure he is prosecuted. Unfortunately, this incident is not first of its kind; there have been many instances wherein the husbands have chopped off the parts of the body of their wives in order to punish them for the alleged misdeeds. Unfortunately, they continue today and there are no strong measures in place to stop them. As a matter of fact, violence against women continue in different parts of the country in different forms and in some parts they seem to be on the rise even.

Helmand Women's Affairs Directorate on Saturday said that they were concerned about a sharp increase in violence against women in the province due to rising insecurity, unwanted traditions and a lack of public awareness on women's rights. According to the directorate, at least 20 cases of violence against women were registered last month, most of which included bad dadan - where girls and women are given to settle a dispute between families, often a blood dispute. Shogufa Anwari, a woman rights activist said that the level of violence against women had not been reduced in Helmand; rather, it had increased due to insecurity, and a large number of women had little access to women's affairs services in government.

As a matter of fact, the issues pertaining to women have been handled by the authorities in a hypocritical manner. They have been used to attract donor funding and treated on project-based manner. Some efforts are made only temporarily to show the donors that there are actions being taken but it is also ensured that the issues are not solved permanently; thus enabling the officials to keep on attracting donor funding.

On the other hand, the magnitude of work that has been done regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan is much less than the funds and resources that have been utilized.

A cursory look at the condition of women in different parts of the country would reveal the whole story. Moreover, the incidents of violence and atrocities against women have kept on multiplying. This is directly linked to the overall security situation.

As the security situation in the country has deteriorated the weaker strata seem to be in trouble the most. There were no serious attention to their woes and now with rising insecurity, the authorities have more excuses for less attention to the issues of women.

Women and many intellectuals believe that even if the security situation improves there will be serious challenges for women to earn a reputable position within Afghan society. Even if there is a peace deal with Taliban, there are fears that Afghan government may sacrifice some of the achievements that are made regarding the heightened role and position of women.

Taliban have never been in favor of active role of women in social and political lives and one of their conditions for peace talks would be limiting their role as much as possible. Keeping the Afghan society in mind, the authorities may accept such a condition.



Opening New ACJC Building Needs to Open the Political Will

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

The Inauguration of a permanent Building for Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC) is a good step to fight against corruption; it is hoped that opening a highly professional security and infrastructure of the new ACJC enables the three institutions that make up the ACJC to work in effective close partnership to end the culture of impunity for corrupt officials without threat or interference. The facility allows for the co-location of elements of the Ministry of Interior, the Attorney General's Office and the Judiciary to ensure high-level corruption can be tackled head-on, in a process that is insulated from political interference or bureaucracy, from end-to-end. It is also supposed to tackle corruption cases in the next few days that involve senior government officials.

During inaugural ceremony the International authorities welcomed the establishment of a new permanent facility for the Anti-Corruption Justice Center funded by UK. They expect new location would provide a secure and functional environment for the investigators, trial attorneys, and judges of the Anti-Corruption Justice Center to help them carry out their vital mandate to investigate and prosecute major corruption cases in Afghanistan. The commander of the Combined Security Transition Command (CSTC-A), Robert Kaiser said that corruption inflicts millions of dollars in financial losses to the Afghan government, and called on officials to take firm steps to stop the scourge.

"Corruption is the enemy of Afghanistan and it kills from the inside out, corruption is why police walk away from their checkpoints" said Robert Kaiser.

The British ambassador to Kabul Dominic Jermy said that the Afghan government should do more to end the trend and to fight corruption effectively. Ambassador Llorens remarked, "Corruption is a cancer that plagues this nation and must be dealt with. The Anti-Corruption Justice Center has the potential to play a vital role in deterring corruption by attacking impunity. Sustained political commitment in the fight against corruption will be essential for success in this great struggle. Jermy said:

"Today is a landmark moment - the inauguration of the UK-funded permanent facility for the ACJC; an institution that is really demonstrating that no longer will high-level corruption in Afghanistan be tolerated. "By eliminating corruption, the Afghan government must ensure that the Afghan people benefit from international aid" he added.

The Inaugural ceremony was almost simultaneous to international anti-corruption watchdog group's report declared that Afghanistan is no longer among the world's three most corrupt nations. The Transparency International (TI) said Afghanistan previously described as the third most corrupt country in the world has now jumped to 8th position in its 22nd annual Corruption Perceptions Index of 2016. However, the TI has its own benchmarks for developing the global corruption index of countries, based on which corruption might have dropped but referring to Afghan people, they have not observed practical change in the trend in their daily

life. Corruption remains a common practice in government institutions, and no senior officials have been tried on corruption charges since the inception of the National Unity Government (NUG), nor has any mega corruption case disclosed during its rule been adjudicated.

On the other hand, the report is in paradox to the latest report by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), that an estimate of \$3b bribes paid in 2016 - an almost 50% increase compared to the year before. From ministers to presidential advisers, many officials accused of corruption still enjoy impunity from prosecution, and not only have they not been brought to justice, but they also hold senior positions of power. Most of the anti-corruption endeavours of the National Unity Government have been symbolic. Afghan people are dissatisfied with the work of government institutions fighting corruption, including the president-led National Procurement Commission (NPC).

Therefore, the NUG not only has failed to fight, but disagreements between its leaders and lack of political will have also allowed it to grow. Despite the fact that the government established the National Procurement Committee (NPC) and the specialized Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC) as part of its deceitful anti-corruption drive, the outcomes are against the claims. The government claimed that the ACJC was designed to try senior government officials, whereas it was also used as a tool to deceive people has no tangible achievement like the NPC. They should realize that they cannot deceive the people for ever; Instead of playing with public perception, the government leaders have to combat corruption faithfully.

Afghan people expect that the activities of anti-corruption programs have to be more systematic and determined based on priority, mega corruption cases should be investigated first, and government officials who pocketed millions of dollars be brought to justice. Psychologically, investigating one major graft case is more useful than tens of small cases, and similarly the dismissal of a corrupt minister is more effective than that of ten low-ranking corrupt public employees, because that, for example, ensures transparency in the entire ministry. For these reason, it seems that corruption has not been appropriately tackled in Afghanistan, and so any report suggesting a decline in corruption level also cannot be acceptable.

Bearing in mind that corruption which is a cancer in Afghanistan; the Successful fight is not possible without a systematic, political approach. NUG must appoint honest leadership in key institutions; make the judiciary independent; promote the law of access to information; establish an independent anti-corruption agency; make asset declaration mandatory for all those who hold power; pay sufficient and justly salary to government personnel, establish transparent mechanism for procurements, provide quality services to citizens and more importantly eliminate the culture of impunity from Afghanistan.

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Three Surprises in 2017

By Anatole Kaletsky

Economic pundits traditionally offer their (traditionally inaccurate) New Year predictions at the beginning of January. But global conditions this year are anything but traditional, so it seemed appropriate to wait until US President Donald Trump settled into the White House to weigh in on some of the main surprises that might shake up the world economy and financial markets on his watch. Judging by current market movements and conditions, the world could be caught off guard by three potentially transformative developments.

For starters, Trump's economic policies are likely to produce much higher US interest rates and inflation than financial markets expect. Trump's election has almost certainly ended the 35-year trend of disinflation and declining rates that began in 1981, and that has been the dominant influence on economic conditions and asset prices worldwide.

But investors and policymakers don't believe it yet. The US Federal Reserve Board's published forecasts suggest only three quarter-point rate hikes this year, and futures markets have priced in just two such moves.

As Trump launches his policies, however, the Fed is likely to tighten its monetary policy more than it had planned before the inauguration, not less, as the markets still expect. More important, as Trump's policies boost both real economic activity and inflation, long-term interest rates, which influence the world economy more than the overnight rates set by central banks, are likely to rise steeply.

The rationale for this scenario is straightforward. Trump's tax and spending plans will sharply reverse the budget consolidation enforced by Congress on Barack Obama's administration, and household borrowing will expand dramatically if Trump fulfills his promise to reverse the bank regulations imposed after the 2008 financial crisis. As all this extra stimulus fuels an economy already nearing full employment, inflation seems bound to accelerate, with protectionist trade tariffs and a possible "border tax" raising prices even more for imported goods.

The only uncertainty is how monetary policy will respond to this "Trumpflation." But whether the Fed tries to counteract it by raising interest rates more aggressively than its current forecasts imply, or decides to move cautiously, keeping short-term interest rates well behind the rising curve of price growth, bond investors will suffer. As a result, yields on ten-year US bonds could jump from 2.5% to 3.5% or more in the year ahead - and ultimately much higher.

In Europe and Japan, by contrast, monetary conditions will remain loose, as central banks continue to support economic growth with zero interest rates and quantitative easing (QE). And this policy divergence suggests a second potential shock for which financial markets seem unprepared.

The US dollar could strengthen much further, especially against emerging-market currencies, despite Trump's stated desire to boost US exports. The catalyst for exchange-rate appreciation would be not only higher US interest rates, but also a dollar

squeeze in emerging markets, where foreign debts have increased by \$3 trillion since 2010. A confluence of dollar strength and excessive foreign borrowing caused the debt crises in Latin America and Asia in the 1980s and 1990s.

This time, Trump's protectionism could make matters even worse, especially for countries such as Mexico and Turkey, which have based their development strategies on rapidly expanding exports and have financed domestic business activity with dollar debts.

So much for the bad news. Fortunately, a third major development that is not priced into financial markets could be more favorable for global economic conditions: the European Union - an even more important market than the US for almost every trading country apart from Mexico and Canada - could do much better than expected in 2017.

Economic indicators began to improve rapidly in most EU countries from early 2015, when the European Central Bank stopped the fragmentation of the eurozone by launching a bond-buying program even bigger than the QE pioneered by the Fed. But this economic recovery was overwhelmed last year by fears of political disintegration. With the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy all facing populist insurgencies - and at least the first three holding elections this year - the Brexit and Trump shocks have naturally provoked anxiety that the next domino to fall will be one of these EU founding members, followed perhaps by the entire EU.

These expectations create the possibility of the biggest surprise of 2017: instead of disintegrating, the EU stabilizes, facilitating an economic rebound and a period of strong financial performance similar to the US "Goldilocks period" from 2010 to 2014, when the economy recovered at a pace that was neither too hot nor too cold. The key event will be France's presidential election, which will most likely be decided in a second-round runoff on May 7. If either François Fillon or Emmanuel Macron wins, France will embark on an economic reform process comparable to Germany's in 2003, undertaken by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Even a mild foretaste of such reforms would encourage a relaxation of the austerity terms demanded by the new German government that emerges from the general election there on September 24. A more cooperative and constructive Franco-German relationship would, in turn, erode support for the populist Five Star Movement in Italy.

The risk to this benign scenario is, of course, that Marine Le Pen wins in France. In that case, a breakup of the EU will become a realistic prospect, triggering panic in European financial markets and economies. Every opinion poll and serious analysis of French politics indicates that President Le Pen is an impossible fantasy. But isn't that what every opinion poll and serious analysis of US politics indicated last year about President Trump? (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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