

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



February 06, 2016

Women's Rights

As the most of the International forces withdrawn from Afghanistan, there are signs that women's rights in Afghanistan may start rolling back as violence against this vulnerable segment of the society is already on the rise and policymakers fail to provide sufficient protection for women. What compound to the fears about a possible setback in preserving the hard-gained achievements for women is the fact that the Afghan government is persistently failing to commit to protect women's rights and international community's interests in defending Afghan women is declining.

The latest case of domestic violence against a woman is only one of a small portion of reported cases of predominantly domestic violence to the government's institutions and human rights groups. Due to the male-dominant and deeply-conservative society, most of the cases of violence are not reported to the authorities as it is deemed against the customs and family pride. According to officials, the real level of violence against women in Afghanistan is much higher than those reported, though, the increase in numbers means that more and more cases of violence are now reported to the government.

As human rights activists and pro-women groups have been organizing campaigns for fighting domestic violence, a number of fresh cases of violence against women were reported by the media. In addition to widespread domestic violence, women's rights are violated in tribal feuds and marriage-related issues. Despite government's efforts for improving women's situation, violation of women's rights in forms of child marriage, feud-settling marriage, or Bad giving, are still widely practiced in conservative rural areas across the country. In many cases, tribal elders and councils deal with cases which involve women, and in most of such dealings, priority and favor are given to family and tribal pride rather than implementing justice.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has disclosed that NUG has failed to make significant gains in achieving human rights reforms in 2015 and little progress has been made in reining in abusive militias, reducing corruption, promoting women's rights, and reforming the courts.

However, what is even more of concerns about the prospect of the hard-gained achievements of Afghan women is that commitments of the Afghan government are declining as the ongoing security and political transitions are the top priorities for the time being. The Afghan government has been failing systematically to take concrete measures for fighting violence against women and considering robust protective arrangements for protecting them. Overwhelmed by challenges such as anti-insurgency campaign and the pervasive corruption, the Afghan government is continuing to fall short of taking sufficient measures for protecting women and preserving their rights.

With the passive role of the government, conservative groups and opponents of women's rights are now have a louder say in opposing human and women's rights. Comparing to previous years, the conservative circles are exerting unprecedented level of pressures for reverting back the achievements gained during the last years.

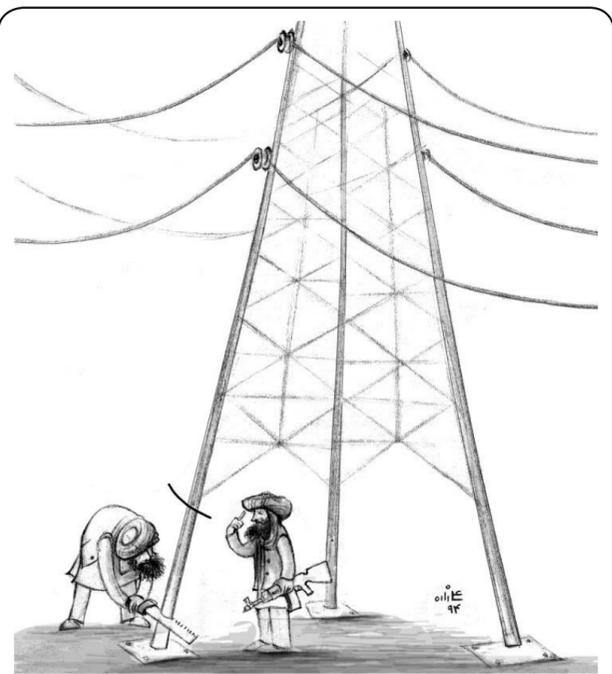
As the main force behind improvements of women's rights, the international community is losing interest in weighing in for the rights of the women in Afghanistan. Recently, the International support for Afghan women has been faltering, with the US and other allied countries focusing more on withdrawing forces from Afghanistan and ending the costly war. With the increasing apathy of the international community towards the Afghan conflict, Afghan women are posed to lose the hard-gained achievements of the past fifteen years.

What is encouraging is that a number of highly-influential US officials and political figures are vehemently trying to fight the public apathy in the West towards women's rights in Afghanistan.

The United States recently announced programs for empowering the women in Afghanistan which is an encouraging sign of international concerns towards the Afghan women.

Amid the political disengagement from the plight of the women, civil organizations and the media can play a crucial role in raising the issue to the international level and persuading the government - and the international community - to do more for protecting the women in Afghanistan.

As the ongoing security transition and the forthcoming elections are currently top priorities for the government, the civil organizations needs to step up campaigns to get international attention to the worsening situation for the Afghan women. The shocking news of mutilation of a woman may only be an instance of another case of violence but is also an alarming sign for a possible rollback of the achievements of Afghan women in the future.



Making Our Society

By Hujjatullah Zia

Auguste Comte, a French mastermind, believes in social organism regarding the society. In other words, he believes that society also passes through three periods like human beings which are infancy, maturity and senility. He illustrates that medieval age was the stage of infancy, Renaissance was the stage of maturity and modern age is the stage of senility. Hence, we live in a senile and grown society. Meanwhile, he believes that along with these three physical stages, society also experiences three more psychological stages too, which are theological, metaphysical and positivism or educational stages. In theological stage, people believed in supernatural causes rather than natural ones. For example primitive people believed that certain inanimate objects have a will of their own and possess some magical powers. In philosophical or metaphysical stages, people were attributing the cause of social changes to abstract factors rather than concrete ones. In the third stage, people logically seek the causes of changes and phenomena in real factors and discover the root causes. Moreover, the three psychological evolutions take place parallel with three physical evolutions in the mentioned order. In addition, August Comte lived in critical age. In other words, he lived in a society which was deep in chaos and social disorder.

The enormous havoc of French Revolution in 18th century, caused social fragment i.e. the previous law and order fell into ruin and no new law was constitutionalized in its real meaning yet. I have mentioned this because it is believed that our country is also experiencing social fragment and political convulsion. The three decades war played havoc in our society and yet our people are burning painfully in the same furnace. To the consternation of the citizens, however people suffer from economic strain, political instability, violent insurgency, etc. none of the political leaders raise eyebrow.

To compound the puzzle, the showdown of national contradictions is easily tangible amongst the political parties. Undeniably, the hot issue of the parliamentary election and worsening security situation overshadowed all the challenges going on in the country. The salience of political contradictions, which may lead to ethnic tension, is shattering the hopes of our people and causes disagreements. Moreover, the veneer and façade of political figures put people in dilemma of joining a certain group.

In the ups and downs of multi-political setups and waves of atrocities and cruelties within the last three decades of war, especially in the time of the Taliban's regime, Afghans suffered to a large extent. After the fall of the Taliban's regime, their radical setup was also demolished.

However, still we face manifold challenges across the country, such as instability, poverty, social disorders, human frailties and cultural vulnerability. In other words, our country is faced political stagnant and the difficulties remain unabated. Therefore, we are suffering from social fragment.

In case of living in a disordered society, normally there will arise many questions in one's mind, such as what are the causes of disorders? How can the society revert to an ordered situation? Have the disorders happened in accident? Do social phenomena lack law and order? These questions pave the way for solutions. Now, as we are in the grip of disorders in our country, these are the questions that we should ask ourselves. Meanwhile, we should find the solutions so as to bring stable social and political structures. Furthermore, Auguste Comte was also the founder of humanism. He believes that if people decide instead of gods and bring changes in their society by their own rather than waiting for gods or metaphysical factors, the society will move towards development.

Of course, according to him people must play their paramount role in their society so as to gain prosperity in their life. He believes that the role of people is far more significant than the role of gods in the society. In short, the more people struggle, the better changes they will bring. So, now we live in modern age and the age of metaphysics and post-maturity. Hence, in this age, it will be very naïve of one who attributes social changes to supernatural causes. We are supposed to find out the real causes and in case of negative changes, we should eradicate the factors. Likewise, we are highly responsible to play our roles positively for the betterment of the society. So, it is time to stop ifs and buts and every single person is morally responsible not to neglect their accountabilities.

In addition, I am tired of pointing my finger, too much, to the government officials and political leaders. It is really easy job to sit and inveigh or rail against the officials for one reason or another. I am sure that it is not only me but many more people who grow the same habits. Of course, our right as citizens for freedom of speech is inviolable, however, how long should we continue this futile manner?

It is hoped strongly that our younger generation will build the society. It won't be paradoxical to my other sayings to state that, in the current relatively secure environment of the country, the only things which can force smile on my lips are the energies and struggles of our younger generation. Besides many challenges that lie ahead of our citizens, I cannot deny the tangible progress of our youths, especially in the field of education. Presently, they are the only panacea for the wounded hearts of Afghan people.

On the other hand, election is also a barometer of the political structure if our politicians do not forget the bitter experiences throughout the history.

I am not contradicting myself and, certainly, the remissness of our politicians is beyond doubt. However, I am talking on the matters of ifs and buts that, if our politicians learn from the history and all the misfortunes, they will play their role differently. The ethnic violence, tribal disagreements, religious sensitivities, etc. all led the society to murder and bloodshed. Moreover, now we only rue the past and the deadly incidents which victimized our people mercilessly.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Oil Dictator Dominos

By Bill Emmott

Price movements as large and rapid as those that have upended oil markets since June 2014 are sure to cause pain to some and benefit others. Though the pain tends to capture the most attention, the benefit is just as important - if not more so. The 70% drop in the price of a barrel of crude represents a colossal transfer of \$3 trillion in annual income from oil producers to oil consumers.

As a result, while sliding equity markets and a further decline in oil (and other commodity) prices have sparked much talk of another global recession, dire predictions are likely to prove overly gloomy and misdirected. To be sure, the dramatic drop in the price of oil will produce winners and losers. But the biggest dangers will be political, not economic.

The shift in fortunes can perhaps best be seen on the boarding passes of International Monetary Fund officials. Rather than going to Athens, they are now heading for Baku. Indeed, Central Asia's oil-producing dictatorships, including Azerbaijan, have been among the countries hardest hit by the drop in prices - especially because, as ex-Soviet states, they remain heavily dependent on trade with Russia, another oil producer. The biggest beneficiaries of the price slump will be the highly indebted, oil-importing countries of the eurozone: Greece, Italy, and Spain (Germany, too, is likely to benefit). Their export markets in emerging economies will suffer, damping hopes of a trade-led recovery, but that negative effect stands to be more than offset by the windfall from a big drop in energy costs. Growth in the eurozone will be based on the resulting increase in domestic demand, rather than exports.

The United States and the United Kingdom are simultaneously energy producers and importers, so the impact on their economics is likely to be more complicated. In 2013 and 2014, energy firms dominated business investment, and cutbacks in the sector will translate into lost jobs and dropping demand for the manufacturers and service companies supplying the industry.

On the other hand, consumer spending in both countries stands to rise. While US consumers have so far saved a large proportion of the windfall they have received through cheaper gasoline prices, the gains for households are starting to translate into higher levels of spending.

Economists are likely to spend months puzzling over why the effect of low oil prices has proved slow to emerge in the consumption statistics. But, ultimately, emerge they will, as they

have every time such a large fall has occurred. The more important question is one for political scientists: Which governments will collapse this year, and with what consequences?

It is no coincidence that the last emerging-markets crisis, in 1997-1998, was also associated with a dramatic fall in oil prices.

In that case, the two biggest victims were a dictator in Indonesia and a fragile democrat in Russia. In May 1998, nine months after the beginning of East Asia's financial crisis, Indonesian President Suharto resigned after 31 years in office. A few months later, Russia defaulted on its sovereign debt as its currency collapsed. On December 31, 1999, President Boris Yeltsin resigned, leaving the country in the hands of his recently appointed prime minister, Vladimir Putin.

In attempting to predict which governments might face a similar fate this time, the basic criteria - in addition to the oil slump's financial impact - are resilience and flexibility. Does a regime have the financial reserves with which to cushion the shock and buy time to adjust? Does a country have a robust banking system? Can its political system contain growing popular frustration or channel it through existing institutions? Oil-dependent regimes that fail to meet these criteria are in trouble.

This analytical framework yields surprising insights. As much as pundits like to predict the collapse of the Saudi Arabian monarchy, they are likely to be disappointed once again. The country is the world's lowest-cost oil producer; and, though its political rigidity is beyond question, it is showing economic flexibility by cutting its budget and introducing wide-ranging reforms.

Russia, however, for all its bluster, may prove less fortunate. Its political robustness is not matched by financial and economic resilience. Putin will try to mask the pain, but at some point it is likely to become debilitating.

The potential victims are many, with worrying implications for geopolitical stability worldwide. Venezuela has been in financial crisis since long before the oil crunch, and Nigeria is looking a lot like Russia in 1998 - a fragile democracy facing a currency crisis.

As to who might become the next Suharto in the coming months, my best guess is one or more of the Central Asian oil autocrats in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. In any case, this year promises to be interesting - and harrowing, if you happen to be a dictator clinging to power in an oil-exporting country. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Bill Emmott is a former editor-in-chief of The Economist.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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