

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



February 25, 2017

Burning Amidst Violence

The unmitigated war in Syria, which inflicts great sufferings on the nation, shatters the hope for fruitful talks. Insurgency does not appear to be abating. Non-combatants sustain indescribable pains and anguish and left at the mercy of the cruel practices of warring parties, including the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group. Women and children bear the brunt of the war and insurgency. Their rights and freedoms are violated as a result of the militants' disregard to the humanitarian law and their blood is spilt and dignity is disrespected on the basis of their racial and religious backgrounds.

With the continuation of war and humiliation of the rights of the public, freedom and democracy for the freedom-fighters are believed to be a pyrrhic victory. Now that this war has changed into a highly complicated game of policy, terrorism will rule the country for many years even if an agreement be brokered between Assad's regime and the opposition. It is likely that militancy has radicalized a great deal of people. Worst of all, a large number of the ideologue radicals have gained firm foothold in the country and will resort to terrorist act as it is done in post-Saddam Iraq and post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The intra-Syrian talks - which will bring together representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition, along with their respective international backers - will resume after UN envoy Staffan de Mistura broke them off nine months ago as several rounds of meetings ultimately led to an escalation of violence across the country.

The talks are part of the latest initiative to bring an end to a destructive six-year war that has killed nearly half a million people, wounded more than a million, and displaced over 12 million - half of the country's pre-war population. They come on the heels of multilateral meetings in the Kazakh capital of Astana aimed at consolidating a shaky nationwide truce and paving the way towards political negotiations. But the ceasefire has steadily fallen apart and an all-out fighting has returned to key areas across the country, as tensions between the truce's guarantors - Russia, Turkey and Iran - steadily rise.

Russia, whose military intervention in Syria was key in turning the tide of war in Assad's favor, has pushed to restart negotiations since helping to facilitate the government takeover of rebel-held east Aleppo late last year, dealing the opposition its biggest defeat of the conflict.

The Astana meetings, in January, brought representatives from Russia, Turkey and Iran - another chief Assad ally - together with delegates from the Syrian government and officials from armed opposition groups. And while the first meeting in the Kazakh capital nominally succeeded in creating a "trilateral mechanism" through which Russia, Turkey and Iran would allegedly monitor and enforce the ceasefire, talks faltered in the second round as violence steadily returned to areas across the country.

Armed groups, particularly in Syria's north, have split in recent months as the international community puts increasing pressure on rebel groups to distance themselves from hard-line Salafist groups linked to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, a group formerly known as al-Nusra Front that changed its name after officially breaking ties with al-Qaeda.

Osama al-Koshak, a Syrian researcher and activist, says that today the opposition would be in a much stronger position if - before the Astana talks - the armed groups had undertaken offensives against the regime to put pressure on it. They had the necessary force but divisions and disagreements made it difficult for them to carry this out, he says.

After the fall of Aleppo and the declaration of a ceasefire that excluded a number of extreme armed groups, infighting erupted in Northern Syria resulting in significant gains for Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, which announced the formation of coalition Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham along with a number of other armed factions. The infighting further weakened the armed opposition in the run-up to the Geneva talks.

"Until now, there is no military body which represents the armed factions and there is no strong political body which really represents political power. This is our main problem as Syrians: There is no one to represent us who we trust," al-Koshak is cited as saying.

The infighting among the opposition will be a strong blow to peace and an obstacle before the peace talks. Syrians will have to support a certain group and select their own representatives so that they can have a fruitful talk with Assad's party. With further hesitation, the number of casualties will increase and militants will fish in the troubled waters. To be clearer, the ISIL and Al-Qaeda groups seek to continue their destructive role each and every minute and narrow the opportunities for talks.

The longer militancy continues the more they will destroy the country. Hence, after almost six years of fighting, which had no result other than destructions and killings, one will certainly consider another strategy to stop violence and to save the innocent's lives. It is time for Syrians to do their best to bring peace through negotiations or else the worst-case scenario will be awaiting them and terrorist groups struggle to keep the bloodbath up. Now that Syrians are weary of war and violence, which paved the ground for the foothold of nationwide terrorists including ISIL, they are in need of national unity to stand against terrorism.

Alignment of Afghan Women with Women's March in January

By Simin Haidery

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Protests during presidential inauguration in United States have been prevalent since inaugural ceremony of President Nixon in 1973. Even during inauguration of Barack Obama back in 2009 there were few protesters whom were chanting for their rights and expressing their gratitude to George W. Bush. However, the marching on January 21, 2017 was far beyond just expressing gratitude to former president of States Barack Obama. According to media reports, more than a million has gathered on respective demonstration. Some social scientists believe that the number of marchers can be as high as 5 million and beyond.

The protest took place to protect the legislations and polices concerning human rights, women rights, racial equality and freedom of religion. Millions rushed to streets in Washington D.C a day after Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony, the day is widely known as counter-inauguration gathering.

Women's march started with a simple Facebook-question by retired attorney in Hawaii, Teresa Shook. She asked her social media friends, what if women marched on Washington around Inauguration Day? The post attracted thousands of people whom signed up to attend the ceremony, just in 24 hours. Later the idea was welcomed warmly not only in United States but also across the globe. In Washington D.C, some famous activists such as Gloria Steinem, a feminist icon of 1960s and 1970s, were witnessed in the massive crowd. While addressing the crowd, she said that "Make sure you introduce yourselves to each other and decide what we're going to do tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." She added, "We're never turning back!"

Women and men in cities including Sydney, Berlin, London, Paris, Nairobi, Cape town marched in solidarity with the marchers in Washington and opposing the values that they think Trump presents. It seemed that cold weather was not a barrier for women's contribution to demonstration. CNN reports that pro-peace, pro-environment march also took place in Antarctica.

Banners, posters, sign boards and placards were carried in Sydney holding messages such as "Girl Power vs. Trump Tower" and "Dump the Trump". In Europe, protesters occupied the streets in Germany, United Kingdom, Spain and France. In London, the far-famed Trafalgar Square hosted more than hundred thousands of people protecting the fundamental values and human rights. London mayor, Sadiq Khan did not keep silent and joined the marchers virtually by tweeting, "show how much we value the rights every woman should have." Previously, the first Muslim mayor of

London, told media that Trump's views of Islam were "ignorant". Later on Saturday, British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) indicated in a report that mayor was witnessed among the crowd marching for women's right in an anti-trump rally.

Among these all the marchers, the individual that significantly caught my attention was; An Afghan refugee women carrying signs and flags in Athens, Greece. The news regarding informed Afghan-women seeking asylum in Greece was stated in CNNWIRE that stunned me. She left me no words but to praise her awareness on the issue.

Probably, the question rises why in Afghanistan, a country who puts its baby steps in democratic world, the demonstration did not take much of attention and was not appreciated by female residents of the country? Are Afghan women inhibiting in Afghanistan are less aware than those of residing outside?

Being an Afghan-female, it is understandable for me and thousands of other ladies residing in the country that female sector of society has been encountering not only one but thousands of problems which are still the legacy of Talibanism mindsets. Women's march would have been a unique opportunity for female residents of the country to get their voices heard by law makers.

On the other hand, they are completely aware of subsequent that would be waiting for them afterwards. The sad story of 27-year old Farkhunda in Kabul and Rokhsana in Ghor has not vanished from memories of Afghan women.

The Afghan refugee women expressing her thoughts on discrimination, is completely aware that her motherland is not yet compatible with her thoughts for gender equality due of that the country is ranked at the bottom of gender inequality table, securing 147th place. Moreover, demonstrations in Afghanistan have no good consequences. The very recent demonstration, held at heart of the capital city, Kabul was replied with a massive explosion. Deh Mazang Square demonstration was known as one of the most peaceful marching in history of the country.

In addition, yet a platform that connects and unites women from across the country on a shared goal is not yet established. Awareness raising on this issue is an important factor.

These all reasons have collectively come together for the residents in the country in order not to be aligned with the rest of world. Events such as women's march, a worldwide demonstration for the purpose of protecting women's rightful rights, is one of its kinds. As martin Luther King, Jr. indicates, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Hope in democracy and practicing these rights in society is the seeds that must be cultivated in the current era of beloved motherland.

Simin Haidery is a freelance Afghan Columnist.

Checks and Balances Before Roads and Bridges

By Paolo Mauro

In the 2016 American presidential election, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump agreed that the US economy is suffering from dilapidated infrastructure, and both called for greater investment in renovating and upgrading the country's public capital stock. Now that the Trump administration is preparing its first budget outline, its initiatives in this area will be a central focus of attention. The United States is not alone. In fact, infrastructure gaps are an even more urgent problem in the rest of the world. Other advanced economies also need to revive moribund investment, and emerging economies need to prepare for population growth, increased consumption, and higher demand for transportation spending.

Initiatives adopted in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis are beginning to promote infrastructure investment. In the European Union, the Juncker Plan - which draws on EU funds to help finance riskier and more innovative projects - aims to generate more than \$300 billion in investment between 2016 and 2018. And there is an even greater push for infrastructure investment in emerging economies - especially China, which is pursuing projects both at home and abroad. In recent years, China has set up domestically funded institutions such as the Silk Road Fund and spurred the establishment of new international financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

When done well, infrastructure investment can revive flagging economies and pay for itself, by galvanizing private-sector activity and fostering economic growth. But when done poorly, public infrastructure spending can lead to corruption and waste, with taxpayers footing the bill for "bridges to nowhere." Properly executed infrastructure investment entails more than just financing; it also requires that all the myriad details of a project's selection, design, and implementation be closely managed.

And here, the keys to success are not just professional skill and technocratic expertise. They are also transparency and a free press. Citizens should have accurate facts about a project, so that they can monitor its progress and pressure policymakers to protect the public interest.

In a new book, Tomas Hellebrandt and I project that consumer spending on transportation will quadruple by 2035 in Sub-Saharan Africa, India, China, and other emerging Asian countries. People who earn \$200 per year spend only 1% of their income on transportation, compared to 18% for people earning \$20,000. In the next two decades, the number of people earning \$6,000-\$20,000 will increase by more than one billion, and many of them will purchase their first car. Meanwhile, the number of people with annual incomes of \$20,000 and above will increase by almost 800 million, and many of them will begin to fly for leisure. Transportation networks in emerging economies will have to expand vastly to keep up with this growing demand. And while advanced economies already have extensive transportation infrastructure and stable populations, their networks urgently need renovation and repair.

Emerging countries will be able to muster sufficient financing for infrastructure only if they expand the role of the private sector; pension funds and life insurance companies, in particular, could furnish vast resources. But to capitalize on this opportunity, pru-

dential requirements for such investors must be loosened, so that they can hold diversified portfolios of infrastructure projects. And co-investment platforms with multilateral and regional development banks should be established, to boost the credibility of these investments.

To attract private investors, governments will need to maintain a stable regulatory environment that is free from arbitrary interference. At the same time, they will have to monitor and disclose fiscal obligations from projects that involve private participation, such as what Chile now does routinely. This will help to prevent government guarantees for public-private partnerships from imposing budgetary costs equivalent to one or more points of GDP, as has happened in Colombia, Indonesia, and Portugal.

Governments will need to foster a culture of transparency to ensure that financing is put to productive use - rather than illicitly syphoned off or directed to low-value-added projects for political purposes. Tenders and key contract features should be routinely published, and good record keeping and quality control must be maintained throughout the procurement process and contract performance.

To deter fraud, governments should reward whistleblowers, and protect them from retaliation. Many of the emerging countries where investment is most needed must urgently reform their institutional framework for selecting and implementing infrastructure projects. But corruption afflicts all countries to some extent, so advanced countries also need to protect infrastructure projects from undue private influence and arbitrary official interference.

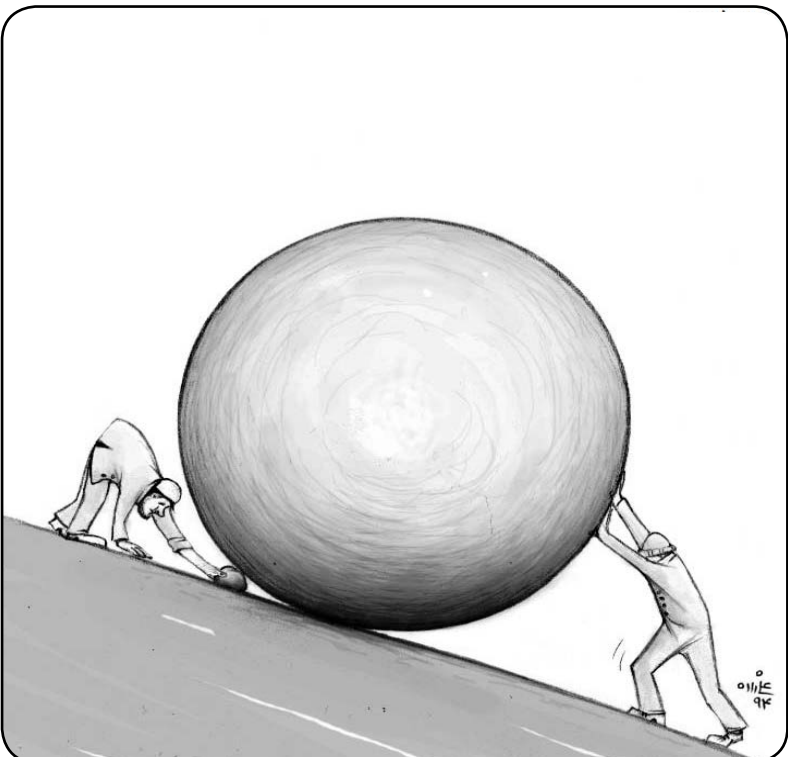
Successfully boosting infrastructure investment in emerging economies is in everybody's interest. And with emerging economies now at the forefront of the fight against climate change, the world will benefit even more if investments in these countries are steered toward green-infrastructure projects. Building new metro-railway networks, instead of roads, would help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions for decades to come.

Advanced countries can help in this effort by supporting green-technology research and development, and by providing financial incentives for climate-friendly infrastructure investment through export credit agencies and multilateral and regional development banks.

With an open and transparent international procurement system, the most efficient technologies would then come out on top. Infrastructure investment holds much promise, but to reap its benefits, policymakers in emerging economies will need to strengthen their institutional frameworks for procurement sooner rather than later. And policymakers in advanced economies should preserve and apply well-known checks and balances, to keep the project-selection playing field level, and to permit monitoring implementation from start to finish.

The views expressed here are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the IMF, its Executive Board, or IMF Management. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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