

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



February 28, 2016

## Class Disparity has Widened in

The so-called development in Afghan society since the downfall of Taliban has not been even. There are different problems that suggest that development has not taken place in the real sense. Some of the most important factors that define development in the modern sense are non-existent in Afghan society. Poverty is still rampant and the class disparities have widened. The gap between the rich and the poor has been stretched to a large extent. There are millions of the people who suffer from lack of basic requirements, while only few families possess most of the wealth of the nation. At the same time social justice is not found anywhere and the inequalities and inequities are frequent.

The stratification among different strata has intensified, which is affecting the society as a whole. The wealth that has poured in the country in the last decade does not seem to have benefited the needy people of the society rather that has been accumulated by certain authoritative people who use it for their own benefits and grandeur. Though the stratification into rich and poor classes existed in Afghan society earlier as well, but it has changed its primitive shape; even in the urban regions the stratification is more like modern upper class and lower class division.

Some argue that this stratification of the society in different strata is a necessity. They believe that it is because of interaction of various strata that the society tends to function as whole - more like functional theory in sociology. However, this argument is quiet debatable. Actually the class based setup in a society is mostly the outcome of the practice of Capitalism. Capitalism, at least in theory, tends to follow justice and demands that everyone should be gifted according to his ability. Thus people with more ability can have as much as they deserve lawfully. Further, the system of Capitalism also allows the individuals to have lawful private property. The modern countries in Europe and America that are based on Capitalism can easily be observed to be having different classes in their societies.

This system seems to be working for them, but there are controversies regarding the future of the system. In fact, if this system has been working for so many countries, there are few pre-requisites that are maintained to a varying extent by these countries that have been helping the system to develop instead of facing a failure.

First, it has been 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 two classes; namely, lower, middle and upper classes. To put it in simpler terms it can be said that social stratification has not been changed to social injustice. Second, social mobility has been made very easy in such societies. Social mobility basically means movement from one social class to another.

For example, it has not been 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 have been equal opportunities for almost all the members of the societies to excel in their lives and become rich. The reverse has been maintained as well, i.e. the people born in rich families but not working hard, have been pushed to the lower strata. Social mobility has been able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.

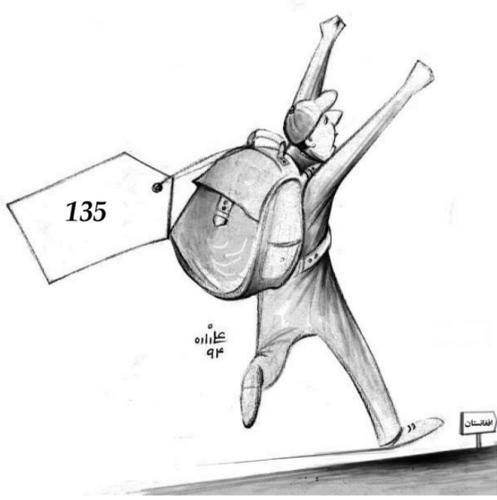
It is also vital to note that in Afghanistan the wealth has poured in without much accountability and weak check and balance system, therefore, the stratification has led to sufferings. The upper class in Afghanistan cannot be said to be in the form as it exists in an industrialized society.

Rather, it includes the landlords, tribal heads and religious leaders. Both political and economic systems tend to revolve around these people who are in total control of entire wealth and its distribution. Further, it is also true that all these people do not seem to have the ability for what they are gifted.

They in pursuit of their own benefits have only made the opportunity of development favor themselves. The poor people of Afghanistan, who have been badly stricken by decades of wars, have only suffered the worst manifestations of poverty.

There are millions who do not have the basic requirements of life and are compelled to live their lives in the remotest areas, without much support and attention. Food, cloth, shelter and other requirements like education and security are non-existent for them.

And at the same time there are people who own properties worth millions of dollars. These are all the results of an intense stratification. The poor do not seem to be having many opportunities of improvements in their lives and that means that social mobility, which can provide oxygen to a stratified society does not exist, while the social injustice is on the rise. The law and order system, instead of treating everyone alike, has served as the slave of the upper-class. The current scenario if goes unchecked can bring further misery to Afghan society.



## Peace Talk - A Continuous Deadlock or Pyrrhic Victory

By Hujjatullah Zia

Peace talk has changed into a tortuous process and Afghanistan made great sacrifices in this regard without a clear outlook. Afghan officials urged the Taliban elements, for more than a decade, to come to negotiating table and established the High Peace Council (HPC) in 2010 to pave the way for amiable talk. However, the Taliban have been refusing the peace offering and continue their acts of terror without mitigation. They have intensified their attacks in recent months and inflicted heavy casualties upon the nation, mainly in 2015.

Holding the fourth round of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) meeting in Kabul on February 23, without the presence of Taliban representative, the four-nation group released that the direct talk between the Taliban and Afghan government will take place in the first week of March. Pakistan offered to host the first round of direct talks following the conclusion of QCG meeting.

"The QCG member states invite all Taliban and other groups to participate through their authorized representatives in the first round of direct peace talks with the Afghan government expected to take place by the first week of March 2016," a joint statement by QCG said. The statement further added that the fifth round of the QCG meeting will take place in Islamabad immediately after the first round of direct peace talks.

However, the Qatar-based Taliban representatives persist on preconditions for joining the peace process, which was announced at the Pugwash research center in Doha on January 23. The Taliban preconditions include complete withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, official recognition of Taliban's political office in Qatar, removal of Taliban from United Nations terrorist blacklist, halt to the arrest and elimination of Taliban, and release of the Taliban inmates from prisons.

On June 18, 2013, Taliban opened an office as the first move towards peace deal after 12-years of fighting, but it enraged Hamid Karzai by styling itself as an unofficial embassy for a government-in-exile. Mr. Karzai raised his concerns about the peace process not being Afghan-led. He suspended plans for Afghan officials to meet the Taliban in Qatar. His concerns were so great that US Secretary of State John Kerry had to promise that the Taliban flag and their sign reading "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" would be removed. But the flag remained, albeit on a shorter flagpole. On the other hand, however, Karzai's administration accepted the last preconditions of the Taliban namely releasing their prisoners, who were arrested in battlefield by Afghan soldiers, and a large number of them were freed from Afghan prisons - this led to tension between Kabul and Washington. Despite the Taliban's insurgencies, Karzai called them "discontented brothers" and showed great patience and generosity towards them.

As a result, when Molavi Abdul Raqib, a former Taliban's refugee minister and one of the members of Dubai peace talk, was shot dead by unknown gunmen in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, Afghan military helicopter transferred his body to Takhar province under Karzai's order. In addition, President Karzai invited Raqib's party Tahreek-e-Islami Taliban to return to Afghanistan and urged other Taliban negotiators to go to safe places. Similarly, he denied signing the security pact despite the approval of Loya Jirga (National Grand Council) and pressure from the public, merely to convince the Taliban to hold Afghan-led peace talk. But none of his acts gave the desired result.

Moreover, the US-led "war on terror" did not come to fruition either. Ultimately, their combat mission ended and the bulk of the American troops withdrew from the country. So, the US also joined the peace process and seeks to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

But Russia denied to participate the four-nation meeting and called it "useless". The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that they did "not see any practical sense in it."

Russia does not want to be just a statistician." Following the Tuesday meeting, Russia has urged the Taliban to start direct talks with the Afghanistan government and hoped for an imminent negotiation. "We are urging the Taliban to do this and we hope that they will start as soon as possible to prevent the beginning of a new 'combat season'," Zamir Kabulov is cited as saying.

Since the Taliban fighters perpetrated war crime and violated the humanitarian law frequently, the prisoners have to be prosecuted fairly. Their aforementioned preconditions are against the Afghanistan's Constitution and international law. It is hoped that the four-nation group, especially Pakistan, put pressure on the Taliban rather than yielding to their preconditions, which bear no legal basis.

Seemingly, breaking the stalemate of peace talk is really hard. As a result, if Afghan government accepts the preconditions, the law will be violated but if the government reconditions against them, the Taliban will not hold negotiation. After all, there is a mistrust between the Taliban and the government, it emerged when the Taliban intensified their inroads, assassinated the ex-head of the HPC Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani under the term of peace talk. Hence, in case of giving positive answer to the preconditions - which are not acceptable at all - will the Taliban give up violence and bloodshed? There is still a sense of doubt and the government has to act more cautiously than ever before. As they did not change their aggressive attitude towards Afghanistan despite Karzai's generous acts, they will continue militancy relentlessly. One will conclude that the deadlock will continue or bringing the Taliban to negotiating table leads to a pyrrhic victory.

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## Syria's Truce a Ray of Hope

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan

The United States and Russia are backing a cessation of hostilities agreement in war-torn Syria which has been accepted by most of the parties involved in the conflict. This is the second ceasefire plan recently which calls on the warring parties to stop fighting but specifically excludes the Islamic State and the Al Qaeda franchise Al Nusra Front. This time there is lot of expectations from this agreement as Russia and America have agreed to act as direct guarantors and monitors of the cessation of hostilities. The agreement states violations of the ceasefire will be reported on a hotline to a special task force co-chaired by America and Russia which will have power to determine a group can no longer be deemed party to the agreement, and so once again open to military attack. This assurance from two global superpowers has raised the hope for success of this agreement between different warring parties and Syrian government. Moreover this agreement endorsed by both US and Russia states that. All opposition groups signing up to the ceasefire will not only cease to use weapons or to gain territory, but also allow "rapid safe and unhindered" access to humanitarian convoys in areas under their control. If this is implemented well on the ground it will act as the major relief and lifeline for Syrian civilians trapped in the besieged areas.

If monitored well and adhered to, this agreement will not only lead to a decline in violence, but also support a political transition to a government that is responsive to the desires of the Syrian people. But still questions has been raised on this agreement like- Some Syrian opposition forces said the exclusion from the agreement of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front was problematic because it could be used as a pretext for attacks on rebel groups and civilians in opposition-held areas. It was pointed out that al-Nusra is not only present in Idlib, but also in Aleppo, in Damascus and in the south in association with moderate rebel forces. But to avoid this kind of attacks from Syrian government the moderate opposition should totally alienate themselves from Nusra Front. Because the Syrian moderate opposition has to understand that being a partner with Nusra Front even on limited fronts will harm their credibility and image. So this is the best time to abandon Nusra. The Syrian conflict is on the verge of resembling a mini-World War III.

Since World War I, never have as many actors with rival agendas and operations been involved in a conflict as they are in that of Syria. If this conflict is not contained and resolved soon, it carries the potential to result in direct military clashes, either by accident or by design, between some of

the main regional and international actors, with horrendous global ramifications. Moreover US Secretary of State John Kerry recently said it would be hard to hold the country together if the fighting did not stop.

So every party involved in the conflict has to understand that there is no military solution and only one thing which can work is talks and negotiations. First thing which is required for any meaningful dialogue which can lead to any kind of political solution is cessation of fighting on the ground. This cessation of hostilities will also closely affects Syria's neighbourhood, most notably Turkey.

The Kurdistan Worker's Party armed wing YPG has announced that it will abide by the cessation of hostilities. Turkey, as a member of the International Syria Support Group, is also expected to buy into and abide by the cessation of hostilities. So this agreement can also lead to drop into violence between Turkey and Syrian Kurds which are in conflict after Turkey airstrikes on YPG recently. One thing that should also be taken into consideration is that a key part of the agreement is full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which states "including the readiness to participate in the U.N.-facilitated political negotiation process". The resolution calls for the government and the opposition to start formal negotiations on a political transition aimed at establishing "a credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance. So this agreement is the first step in direction of formal peace talks.

Members of the 17-nation group backing Syria's peace process are to meet in Geneva Friday to work out further details of the agreement, which is then expected to be endorsed by the UN Security Council.

There are a hopes a successful ceasefire will lead to the resumption of peace talks that collapsed in Geneva earlier this month. Immediately following the formal cease-fire, the United Nations would convene all of the Syrian factions that accepted the plan to begin negotiating on the future of a unified Syrian state.

Then a comprehensive political framework can be work out that includes reform of Syrian institutions, formation of a new government, the identification of "terrorist groups" and a plan for elections. At this point, almost any peace plan would be better than the current war. Every proposal is not without its challenges, downsides or risks. But it would be far better than the status quo and more practical than any of the other alternatives. This agreement paved the way for a more durable ceasefire and resumption of peace talks which can lead to a better future for Syria and its people.

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