

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



January 02, 2018

The Hopes in New Year

The year 2018 has started and hopefully it will result in new and better days for all the people in the world; particularly, those who have been suffering from different problems, issues and difficulties. Our country Afghanistan is also one of the countries that have been facing hardships and instability within its social, economic and political structures, and its people have experienced the times that others can hardly imagine about; however, the hopes that this year is going to bring imperative changes are very much alive.

With the arrival of the new year, we have the profit and loss statement of the year that has gone by in our hands. During the time that has passed we have less profit than loss; however, the new year that we have entered may give us great opportunity to make up for all the loss and for that we have great expectations. The greatest opportunity in this year would be that we would be given a chance of deciding our own destiny to a certain extent and this opportunity has been achieved after a lot of hard work and sacrifices. At the same time, this year would be a year wherein we would be tested to a large extent.

We should expect that there would be many things happening in this year and whether these happenings would be in our favor or would turn out to be against us depends on ourselves largely. Now, we ourselves have to be the accountable and the judge.

We are now on a road to a democratic country and we need to pursue the same track. The nourishment of democracy this year would require us to be really vigilant. We would require amending our conscience and our inner selves. The departure or distance from democracy would only spoil us to a further extend. Now that we have decided to welcome it with open arms we require changing ourselves.

The behavior of democracy is largely based on the art of speaking and the patience to listen adequately. Democracy supports the freedom of expression and allows everyone to say what he wants to say. In democracy we basically accept the sort of environment wherein we can be opposed openly. Those people who support democracy fundamentally want that the issues should be solved through dialogue and reasoning not through violence.

They want that the opposite reasons should be listened to sufficiently and the claims should always be reconsidered.

Within democracy, first of all we need to develop the preparedness to accept that the truth may not be with us and it may be with others. Democracy is never suitable for those who believe that their views are absolute and final and they do not have the patience to listen others.

The absolute truth has never been known by the people. Yes, certain aspects of a complete truth have been known and people have to compromise with the same.

These aspects are present within different circles. Within the circle of politics the aspect of truth lies within a system which considers the welfare of the people as its basic pillar. And, democracy strives to establish the sort of circumstances that are suitable to guarantee welfare of the people. Though we have had considerable strides towards democracy, yet there are many behavioral issues that we need to deal with. We have dishonesty in our intentions and extremism in our actions. The difference in opinion and thoughts are dealt through intolerance and even violence. Our statements have taken the shape of threats. Some people have even started the attitude of calling others with different opinions as non-Muslims and infidels.

The true spirit of democracy can only be found in the theories and promises; therefore, the people do not see the true practice of it and are ambiguous about it. This is really unfortunate that at this instance of hope and great expectations we are suffering from these problems; yet, we do not have to be disheartened.

If we really like democracy and democratic values, we would require making its prerequisites possible. We would need to feel our responsibility in order to lead our country towards true democracy; otherwise, the dream of democracy may shatter and we will not be able to recreate it. Though the roles of government and the people play a very important role in it, most of the responsibilities go to those leaders and religious scholars who have great influence in forming the opinion and the attitude of the people.

They need to understand that instead of sowing the seeds of hatred and intolerance in the minds and hearts of the people, they can spread love and tolerance and they can really participate in forming an environment that is suitable for democracy. Since, the strongest democracies within an environment of debate and discussion, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose.



Children – The Victims of Conflicts

By Hujjatullah Zia

Last year has been deadly for people in general and for children in particular. Children suffered severely in conflict zones and fell victim to war and violence in many parts of the world. They were denied their rights and dignity. All warring sides, including governments and anti-government parties, violated their rights in some ways or the other.

To view the Thursday's attack in Kabul, which was claimed by the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a large number of children were killed and wounded in cold blood. After all, the suicide bomber is also said to be a child, which reflects the fact that scores of children are recruited by the militants to be used in wars. Their blood is shed, their honor is trampled upon, and they are used as pawns in political games.

According to the UN children's agency, children in conflict zones suffered "at a shocking scale" around the world in 2017 as they became the front line targets; used as human shields, killed, wounded and recruited to fight. Children fell victim to rape, forced marriage, abduction and enslavement in different parts of the world, including Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Myanmar, said UNICEF. The rival factions in conflict areas were accused for flagrantly disregarding international laws that are designed to protect the most vulnerable. The agency warned that millions more children were paying an indirect price for conflicts, suffering from malnutrition, disease and trauma as basic services, including access to food, water, sanitation and health.

"Our appeal is, as UNICEF, to all fighting parties, whether they are governments or rebel groups, to make sure the children are protected," UNICEF's deputy director Justin Forsyth is cited as saying.

According to reports, violence has driven 850,000 children from their homes and an estimated 350,000 children have suffered from severe acute malnutrition in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Kasai region.

In Yemen, nearly 1,000 days of fighting left at least 5,000 children dead or wounded with more than 11 million children in need of humanitarian assistance.

In South Sudan, where conflict and a collapsing economy led to a famine declaration in parts of the country, more than 19,000 children have been recruited into armed forces and armed groups, the statement said. Over 2,300 children

have been killed or injured since the conflict first erupted in December 2013.

The militants largely violate the human rights of children and exploit them on a large scale. They lose their lives in terrorist attacks and suicide bombings. One the one hand, the children easily fall for the bogus claim and ideological indoctrination of radical parties. On the other hand, they are targeted by the militants and lose their lives in Improvised Explosive Device (IED), suicide bombings, airstrikes, etc.

The reports about the children's casualties are highly shocking. They are used as fuel in war and violence. Since children are not able to raise their voice in terms of injustice and atrocities, they are doomed to grin and bear it. Female children are particularly left at the mercy of militancy and injustice for two main reasons: First, because they are children and their rights are underestimated. Second, they are discriminated on the basis of their gender, especially by the militants who practice upon a highly misogynistic view.

The Thursday's attack in Kabul filled many mothers with an outpouring of grief. They shed bitter tears over the dead bodies of their children – who were killed in cold blood. In the event, you could see not only the dead bodies of children, but also small hands and legs scattered around that would fill you with a strong sense of hatred toward the atrocities of mankind.

Needless to say, involving children in conflicts, be it through recruiting or targeting, is war crime. That is to say, the parties engaged in conflicts are not observing the rule of war. They show respect neither to international instruments nor to the life of people.

The endemic violation of children's rights and their involvement in conflicts will be a stain on public conscience. There seems no end to their susceptibility to civil unrests or global conflicts. Streams of their blood are shed around the globe. Considering all these issues, it will be a great disgrace for human societies to simply count the fatalities of children rather than protecting their rights or alleviating their sufferings. Moreover, it is believed that the international community does not take a concrete step to stop the gross violation of children's rights. If violators of children's rights are not prosecuted or if no sanction is imposed on the countries trampling upon children's rights, the same trend will continue, which is highly outrageous.

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The Diverse Effects of Investment Barriers

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Paving the way for foreign and domestic investment is considered as a key factor for developing the Afghan fragile economy. Promoting investment will help domestic production, unemployment reduction and decrease Afghanistan's reliance on imports of foreign goods. Though the National Unity Government (NUG) officials stress that encouraging and facilitating investments is a top priority for the government to help grow the country's economy but Afghanistan is facing major constraints to economic growth, stability and investment outflow. Insecurity remains a foremost concern hampering new investment and prevent the expansion of previous ones. Yet, there is a strong dependence on donor assistance, which funds more than two-thirds of the national budget.

Given the economic policy of the past 17 years, it seems that since the beginning of Karzai's administration there has never taken any serious measures against economic issues though we were happy with that unsustainable economic growth during Karzai's administration. Almost, all the people believe that it is because of being dependent to foreign countries and lack of political wills for fundamental change in this sector. But now, more than anytime, country is faced with critical economic condition with less than 2% growth per year! Economic experts say when a country has 2/3% annual growth in a year, it is a sign of entering to economic Stagnation.

The major symptoms for this economic sickness is high rate of unemployment, low labor income, investment outflow, capital flight and decline in values of national currency.

The values of Afghan currencies decrease with the passing of each hour, but the central bank has not done anything as a policymaker and responsible for the stability of the Afghan currency, except for direct intervention by pumping dollars to maintain its value. Whereas, the currency policy is all economic policy which affect the supply and demand of currencies, and in particular the exchange rate of domestic currency against foreign currencies. The countries, never allow to use direct-policy (Direction Action) using the Auction tool, but unfortunately the central bank has relied on this policy unreasonably.

This is a misunderstanding and ineffectiveness of the Central Bank of Afghanistan which the value of Afghan currencies today is decreasing with the passing of each day.

The investment support agency, AISA, was established in 2003 aimed at removing investment barriers and providing facilitations for potential investors.

The Afghan government also established a ministerial-level High Economic Council for overseeing efforts to improve the economy and attract foreign investors for investments in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, statistics and economic indicators shows incomparable economic stagnation in the country. For instance, the rate of unemployment upturned to more than 3 million today comparing to three or four years ago, when it was nearly 2 million. It which means nearly one million people became jobless in contrast to the presi-

dent's pledge to create millions new jobs. Afghanistan has enough economic potentialities such as: mines, agriculture, transportation, industries and business to end the long-term economic crisis. There also is interest for investment in aforementioned fields provided that we have a clear vision for supporting and creating safe environment for investments in the country. Many experts have called on government to clarify its vision for short-term and long-term investment attraction.

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) believes that government has not done enough to solve the challenges around attracting investors. Recently, the Chamber of Commerce and Industries claimed that the rift between President Ashraf Ghani and Atta Mohammad Noor, the CEO of Jamiat-e-Islami party and outgoing governor of Balkh, has affected investment in the province. Thus, the recent lockdown strikes against cruel attacks on Nangahar money exchanging shop and the brutal attacks in Kabul is another example of daily challenges which create fears and concerns for the investors.

In addition to insecurity challenge, there are some other barriers such as corruption, racism, nepotism, lack of financial resources, lack of clear strategy, required infrastructure and maybe political will. However, according to expert Improved security is the prime factor needed for boosting investment and promoting economic growth.

Potential foreign investors have fears and concerns regarding the future of the investments they make in a country not only stable politically but also with less structural services and regulatory and financing backing. Afghanistan's legal and regulatory frameworks for making investments and doing business are nascent and to some extent and some areas flawed.

Improved regulatory framework would assure the investors of protection of their capital, investment and rights in any circumstances. The Afghan government needs to take extra measures for assuring investors and industrialists for their security. Though, in general, security situation is related to the war and peace efforts in the country and the government's ability to defeat the insurgency and improve security across the country.

Overall, the economy of Afghanistan should not override by political games; otherwise Afghanistan may face irrepressible uprising against current crisis, which will not only be in our interest, but also will aggravate the Asian economy.

The way out of this situation is a detailed discussion of the work, but what is very important is the existence of economic self-sufficiency at the strategic level of Afghanistan. It is important for Afghan policymakers to go further from artificial and expeditious stage.

The history taught us that myopia policy does not rescue this nation. For immediate consideration, there is need for an extra measure to ensure safe environment for investors and industrialists in the country.

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