

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

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Unemployment - A Major Challenge

Hundreds of men, some on crutches, all wearing tattered clothing, gather shortly before dawn at major intersections throughout Kabul and other Afghan cities. Displaying primitive tools such as a level or a trowel, they seek labor that is often backbreaking, always temporary and will earn just a few Afghanis for a day's work.

Employers circle the intersections, eyeing the crowds. Usually they are looking for one or two workers for minor construction tasks. Before they even stop, dozens of men swarm their vehicle, fighting with each other to get one of perhaps five or six jobs available that morning. These men come and stand here all day for someone to come and hire them as workers. Most of them are not lucky enough to find work and those who find work earn just between 200 to 300 Afghanis per day. The laid-off workers or job seekers, who are unable to find jobs, are filled with great disappointment and they worry how to put food on their table-clothes or pay their mortgage. It is really a matter of concern for people who lost their jobs through no fault of their own and are just trying to stay afloat. Despite billions of dollars from abroad to develop this impoverished country since the U.S-led invasion toppled the Taliban regime in 2001, roughly 12 million people, or eight out of every 10 working-age Afghans are unskilled day laborers, according to an International Labor Organization report. Most land only temporary jobs.

A major challenge faced by Afghan's economy today is one of providing opportunities for income generation to the fast-growing manpower. With the country's population escalating rate, first priority is obviously job creation. However, the current political stagnation has led to a massive exodus of young people to cities and this has caused rapid urbanization in the country which, in turn, has created difficulties of its own. Moreover, Afghan refugees abound in camps, in foreign countries, to escape hunger and economic constraints. Unemployment is a serious problem. Jobs are needed not just to provide livelihood to people and their families; they are also needed because people with nothing to do can form a huge reservoir of discontent. Joblessness robs a person of his self-esteem and he has no stake in socio-economic development having been denied the sense of ownership and economic empowerment that a secure job gives a person.

Although violence, terrorism and political unrest are the major reasons behind unemployment, nonetheless there also exist many other factors. For instance, in rural areas, work is also temporary - but it's also seasonal and often illegal. Some of the biggest employers, opium-producing poppy farmers, provide tens of thousands of short-term jobs. Every year, more than 400,000 young people enter the Afghan labor market - a number which is far beyond the labor market's capacity to absorb young workers. Given Afghanistan's high fertility rate of 5.1 children per woman and an on-going 'youth bulge', the pressure on the labor market can only be expected to increase.

The post-2014 withdrawal of international troops will undoubtedly create a high level of uncertainty among the national and international community, and a potential reduction in aid. The political stagnation has aggravated the problems and the Afghan presidential election was no more than a flash on the pan and the mouth-watering slogans of the presidential candidates seem to be on wane.

Ordinary workers depended heavily on construction, trucking and other sectors that saw boom times because of the presence of foreign troops and aid projects - and now there is coming bust, as soldiers withdraw and development budgets shrink and the foreign aids dwindle. Insecurity also affects investors and cause unemployment. Increasing Taliban-led militancy, poor living condition particularly in the countryside, and the sway of warlords coupled with corruption and poppy cultivation have enabled militants to challenge government and exploit the situation for their benefit.

According to the officials at least 500,000 job opportunities will be required amid NATO troops' withdrawal from the country and as the foreign aid tapers off that will have direct impact over the economy of Afghanistan.

The officials further believe that the jobs' needs to be created within a year to combat growing unemployment. Some of the international organizations including local companies are making workers redundant as international aid money declines and foreign troops left Afghanistan. The National government comes under severe criticism from the public and from the Afghan officials. As a result, Shekiba Hashimi, a female parliamentarian talked emotionally about the joblessness of the Afghan youths on Wednesday. She said that the government faces budget deficit and is unable to provide job opportunities for them yet injustice is the daily practice in our country. She warned that unemployment will force our youths to join Taliban militants.

Before the presidential election, Afghan people hoped that unemployment will end with the election; however their dream did not come true. Currently, the delay for determining members of cabinet has shattered the people's hopes. Hence, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani are urged by the people and by parliamentarians to break the deadline and determine the members of cabinet as soon as possible.

Furthermore, some economists are recommending agriculture as an option for job-seekers. "Agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, and there are thousands of job opportunities in this sector if proper planning and execution are done."

Investments so far have primarily been directed toward short-term projects, economists say. While they represent a step in the right direction, Afghanistan requires longer-term solutions to adequately address unemployment.



People are more Important than Leaders

By Dilawar Sherzai

A cursory look at the history of political philosophy shows that most of the works are dedicated to the leaders - one of the basic discussions has been on how the leaders should be? There are piles of books and arguments regarding the ways leaders can adopt to be influential and can thus lead their nations. There are even discussions on how the leaders should look like, how they ought to talk and how they must walk. Moreover, there has been great emphasis on the role and the importance of the leaders in the society. Though before Plato, there were thinkers who thought that people who are ruled are as important as the leaders, that's why Pericles of Athens had said, "Although only a few may originate a policy, we are all able to judge it," nonetheless, Plato himself thought that leaders were indispensable, "The greatest principle of all is that nobody, whether male or female, should be without a leader. Nor should the mind of anybody be habituated to letting him do anything at all on his own initiative; neither out of zeal, nor even playfully. But in war and in the midst of peace - to his leader he shall direct his eye and follow him faithfully. And even in the smallest matter he should stand under leadership. For example, he should get up, or move, or wash, or take his meals... only if he has been told to do so. In a word, he should teach his soul, by long habit, never to dream of acting independently, and to become utterly incapable of it."

In fact, Plato's philosophy was the basis for a totalitarian society. It was his theory that led to the demands for the Philosopher King and that started the discussions regarding the role and the nature of the leaders.

Years after what Plato had said, talking about the qualities of the Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli had said that the Prince should be as brave as a lion and as cunning as a fox.

Moreover, there are various discussions and various books that are written about the grandeur, achievements and activities of the kings and the leaders. The authoritarian societies generated historians that would only write about the achievements of the leaders and their magnificence.

Though since the rise of modern democratic states there has been more emphasis on the liberty and openness of the society and the discussion has to some extent been diverted from the leaders to the people. Some basic questions now asked are how should the people be and what sorts of institutions must be formed and how they must be maintained, nevertheless, the discussions regarding the leaders and their exalted positions and roles still persist.

It is important now that in the modern times more discussion and attention should be diverted from the leaders to the people and the institutions they form. As in the modern democracies it is the people who ultimately make decisions through their votes and their voices. As Eugene Jarecki had said, "The whole idea of democracy is that we ourselves, the people, are supposed to make a path of our politics, and it is we who with our feet and our vote and our labors and our vigilance are supposed to shape our country." Thus, it is now time to trust and depend on the people, not the leaders alone. Though leaders play their role but their role should be of a team player, not of a tyrant who strives to push the people by force towards a particular goal. Except some countries where still there are authoritarian regimes, the leaders are expected to be more like servicemen, making different services available for the people.

The people, at the same time, are expected to be vigilant and aware regarding their rights and responsibilities. They now require understanding that they don't have to depend on the leaders all the times. They have to take responsibility and start changing their lives and their societies by themselves. It has been observed that the people blame the leaders on most of the cases even in the cases where the responsibilities are on the people themselves. It has to be understood now that when a leader can't change the fate of a nation alone in the similar fashion he can't be responsible for all the bad things that happen to the nation. The people, thus, must not pass the buck and at least shoulder their own responsibilities.

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The Misdirected Policy of Western World!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

The shameful and baseless policies and strategies of Western world have almost brought this world into the edge of destruction. Starting from Afghanistan, to Syria, the Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Libya and large number of African countries are burning in a fire and the situation is so complex that no think-thank might have thought of these grave consequences. Every intervention by the US and its Western allies have resulted in deaths of millions, the displacement of millions more and of course, the destruction, anarchy and the resultant drift and divide that took these countries many years backward but unfortunately, none of these interventions or occupations gave away the projected results. In almost all of the mentioned countries, people have started yelling that they were far better when they were living before these interventions. There were the dictators like Saddam Hussein or Bashar-al-Assad, there were military dictators and there were the non-democratic rulers but all of them were better than what they are left with today. The situation has given rise to a popular perception in the Muslim world that it was the policy of the West to weaken all the Muslim countries and they have achieved their aims very nicely. Now, no Muslim country can be called free of the direct or indirect impacts of these interventions. Countries like Pakistan are fighting Taliban within their borders, Turkey is still growing with the fear of Kurds and now ISIS fighters, Saudi Arabia and Iran are caught in the conflict of fighting for Sunni-Shia dominance in the region and in this way, no country seems to be stable, safe and secure in the Muslim world. No need to mention here those large numbers of countries where insecurity and militancy has brought almost each and everything to zero.

The biggest failure of the Western policy was Iraq where country has fallen into the hands of ISIS which is turning out to be more dangerous than the regime of Saddam Hussein. The government of Iraq is limited to capital Baghdad and its outskirts only and is also facing the worst political turmoil since its invasion by Western powers. Thanks to the support of Shia militants from Iran and supporters of Shia cleric As-Sadr who have shown some resistance before the whole country could have fallen into the hands of ISIS. After staying away from Iraq for two years, US President Barack Obama authorized US troops to carry out airstrikes against the ISIS militants so that the minority Yazidis may be rescued and aid can be taken to them. Almost the same is situation in Afghanistan where the condition of security is getting exacerbated even before the coalition forces leave the country. The control of government is limited to the provincial capitals only and many urban areas have fallen into the hands of militants and Taliban. Increasing number of military operations against these militants in which more than hundreds are killed every day from both the sides, and increasing attacks of Taliban and militants shows that coming days are going to be much difficult for the Afghan security forces and Afghans in general. Taliban exhibited their strong power by carrying out attacks in group of thousands of militants in different parts of the country at the same time like Kunduz, Badakhshan, Helmand, and other parts and our security forces are still struggling a lot to take back their posts. Only hope is that, once the election standoff is resolved and country excels on the path of democratic stability, militancy will die of its own and smooth running of the state will turn the things around. It must be kept in mind that

if US doesn't want the fate of Afghanistan similar to that of Iraq, it must review its policy of abandoning the country at the end of this year or 2016. Until and unless the country becomes absolutely stable politically and economically, and its security forces don't come up with the expectations of fighting all the external and internal threats, abandoning the country would be the repetition of the mistake once done by world power after Afghanistan was left on the fate of fighting factions after the exit of Russian forces.

The conditions are even worse in Africa, starting from Libya to Nigeria and onwards. In Libya, the country is facing the worst militancy of its history and different factions are fighting for power. The fighting, insecurity, ethnic and racial divides and other factors have not only badly affected this already shaking continent but also pulled it many decades backward. These reasons may also be the base of further fighting and conflicts in the region for the years to come.

Same fears are felt about the decision of Britain and the US to provide arms to the Kurds of Iraq who are fighting ISIS. Experts fear that this may be the base of disintegration of a central government in Baghdad but also cause serious and permanent threat to its neighboring countries especially Turkey that has long been fighting Kurds on its borders.

However, these saddening and tragic situations in the above mentioned countries have turned two points clear; one, you can never achieve a positive result from a negative way. Starting from Iraq to Afghanistan and then to Libya, all the invasions and interventions were made to liberate these countries of the militants and dictators and the resultant circumstances even turned out to be worse. In all these countries, millions of people lost their lives and trillions of dollars of American and European taxpayers were also wasted. After this, before making any kind of military intervention in any country, it must be thought if the targets and objectives are positive or not. If they are merely to protect your own rights and benefits, you would soon end in failure but this failure would cause the deaths of thousands of people. In all these countries, we can hardly find people who should be able to advocate the right of Western powers to make military intervention and they unanimously term it to be a failed strategy. Secondly, the policies and strategies should not be based on baseless fears and speculations. In many countries, the interventions started just to topple down a leader who was not 'your ally' or was not 'acceptable' for you. In order to bring a favorable person into power, different kinds of conspiracies were invented and in the worst scenario, the military intervention was put into practice. However, the same person turned out to be 'non-acceptable' after some time and once again, each and everything had to be started from the beginning.

In all these issues, the most saddening is the discovery that the efforts and resources wasted from a negative approach could have changed the fate of these countries and the world if utilized by positive approach like for making schools, boosting up agriculture and commerce, strengthening the political institutions and others. But of course, they were going to bear fruit in long term and none of the Western powers are interested in long-term investment when they lack the vision to see its results.

After such bloody and tragic instances, let's hope that world powers should rethink their strategy of making interventions in the affairs of other countries.

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