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Strong Economy Ensures Political Constancy

Economy plays a vital role in development and progress of a country. Without sound economy it is a figment of imagination to think about order and stability in other fields of life. It can be observed in today's world that the countries with stable economies are dominant in various areas, the most important of which is politics. The international political arena is basically overshadowed by giant economies. Just consider the level of influence that the developed countries, like USA, UK and China have in contemporary international politics. Politics is the game of power and power erupts from money, while money is generated through a proper economic infrastructure. In the international politics power may relate to different sorts of influences that may affect various decisions in international relations. Whether it is conflict or agreement, diplomacy or war, international organizations or national policies, power has a decisive role. And, that power rests with the countries that have large GDPs and great businesses. Therefore, it is easy to see the world powers having strong influence and say in different diplomatic undertakings and conflicts and wars in international political order. In fact, the current political order is designed by the most dominant economies among the developed nations of the world. The current political order, wherein capitalism and democracy have joined hands and reign most parts of the world is not very different from what the gigantic capitalist economies want them to be. A thorough study of economy and politics will reveal that economy is the root of a political system. For example, when human societies mostly had agriculturalist economies, there were no democracies and the political systems were based on monarchy and landlordism. However, as the societies evolved to industrialized economies there was a shift towards democracy. Thus, economy to a great extent decides the form and nature of the political system and, therefore, instable economy gives rise to instable political order and stable ones gives birth to stable political systems.

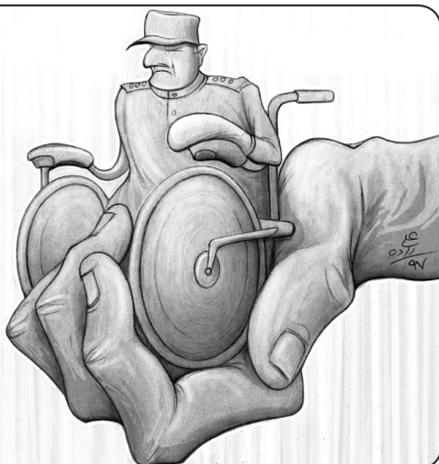
It can also be observed that the societies where the people are mostly poor and do not have the facilities of life, there are more chances of political upheavals. The discontented people, suffering from destitution would ultimately strive to overthrow the political order and would never respect such a system. Resultantly, it can be said that the societies that are economically instable are more prone to revolutions, disturbances and chaos. The third world countries can be observed in this regard. As the people are poor, do not have basic requirements of life and suffer from unemployment, they are more vulnerable to be the cause of instability. And, that is why we find them to be more attracted towards rebellions, crimes, terrorism and thus instability.

Afghanistan is one of the countries where economic instability has given birth to political instability. As there is no stable economic infrastructure, the country's democratic structure has shaky foundations. In Afghanistan insecurity has been influencing the economic life to a large extent. Both national and international businessmen are not readily willing to invest in all the sectors and they do not see positive prospects of their businesses. As insecurity has been overwhelmingly influencing the country, the development in the basic infra-structure has been meager.

The doubts and uncertainties of the Afghan market have made the international investors to think thousand times before they take an initiative to start their businesses in the country. Though there are great opportunities in Afghanistan and the country is blessed with different types of mineral and other natural resources, the economic infra-structure has not been able to get enough attention.

Apart from that there are other factors as well that have been influencing the economic system of Afghanistan. The insufficient and unfavorable business environment is also one of the issues affecting Afghan economy. There have to be strong business laws governing the society and controlling the business. The laws should not only safeguard the rights of investors and businessmen but also make sure that the competition within the system is maintained on strong and fair footings. The evils like monopoly based on unfair competition must be tackled with properly and there should be strong bodies that control the prices within the markets, which at the present are non-existent and the businessmen are fixing the rates on their own. This has given rise to a political system that, on the exterior, is called as democratic but in reality is an ad-hoc arrangement that has no strong foundation.

Afghan economy, therefore, require structured development towards a capitalist society. And in this regard, businesses can play a vital role. If within a system there are consistent investments and different businesses, the system is on a track towards development and prosperity. Since the very inception of human society, human beings have required businesses so as to have their requirements fulfilled. Throughout human history, businesses have taken different forms and characteristics and today have reached to a very advanced form. From the barter system to today's advanced era when the businesses are taking place online, there has been a series of different practices, but the vitality of the business has never been lost. Having developed its economic infrastructure based on capitalism or free market economy marked with stability, Afghanistan's political system can continue its journey towards a truly democratic country dominated by stability.



The Pros and Cons of Freedom of Speech in Afghanistan

By: Hujjatullah Zia

With the emergence of relative democracy in the post-Taliban government, Afghans have been entitled to voice their opinion publicly. Everyone sought to raise their concern in spoken and written forms, especially on social media.

The media in Afghanistan, which resurfaced following years of standstill as a result of authoritative regimes, have played a highly constructive role since 2001 through monitoring the government and narrating the story of Afghan men and women to the world. Besides imparting information to the public, media also criticized officials openly.

The impartial role of many Afghan media in imparting information and narrating the positive and negative aspects of people's life is outstanding. That is, Afghan reporters and journalists made the best use of the nascent democracy and freedom of speech.

The right to freedom of speech and print was advocated by Afghan government and preserved in Constitution as Article 34 says, "Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution." It adds, "Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities."

Similarly, Afghan Constitution recognized the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to further support democracy and the rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, of the citizens. Hence, freedom of expression is also supported by UDHR which states in Article 19, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." However, freedom of speech has been challenged in one way or another.

A number of officials miscondacted journalists on several occasions. They hurt journalists physically with impunity. Worst of all, journalists came under attacks carried out by warring parties. That is, a number of journalists were intentionally targeted by militants, including the Taliban, for reporting the cruel acts of terrorist groups and revealing their flagrant violation of humanitarian law to the public. Last year, Afghanistan has been reportedly placed at the top of the list for the number of journalists and news media staff killed in work-related attacks. In the list, published by The International Federation of Journalists, Afghanistan was first with the death of

16 journalists, Mexico followed with 11, Yemen with nine and Syria with eight. Unexpectedly high on the list, the US, which is a strong democratic state, was in sixth place with the death of five journalists. Hence, despite the fact that Afghan Constitution advocates freedom of speech, insurgents deal strong blow to this freedom.

Nonetheless, Afghan journalists and media staff will not be deterred. They seek to continue their activities with strong determination but urge the government to ensure their security. Moreover, those who misconduct journalists and media staff have to be prosecuted regardless of their political position or social status since everyone is equal in the eye of law.

In terms of social media, freedom of speech has been exploited to a great extent since it is a free and open platform for every individual with unstructured communication. The bulk of online users in Afghanistan do not use this platform positively for many reasons. For the one, a number of individuals who have access to social media, mainly Facebook, lack very basic knowledge. They scroll up and down for many hours simply to entertain themselves, which is a waste of time. In case of commenting on a subject, they hold very partial position with banal literature, which is based on their own state of mind rather than knowledge or educational analysis. Individuals simply transcend the border of freedom of speech through using foul language, hate speech, and offensive rhetoric.

Similarly, a number of users ostensibly attack religious beliefs, cultural values and racial differences of the community, which is an open misuse of freedom of speech. In other words, the Afghan netizens do not consider the "harm principle", proposed by John Stuart Mill in "On Liberty", which suggests that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." Or "offense principle", which supports speech limitations, is ignored by social media users in the country.

Overall, freedom of speech is strongly supported by Constitution, but lack of law-enforcement and militancy are the two barriers before this freedom. Unstructured interaction and ignoring limitations of freedom of expression add to the challenges. Hence, the government must pay due attention to this issue through enforcing law so as to ensure freedom of speech for all citizens in general and for journalists and media staff in particular.

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Afghanistan's Rigid Cultural Norms; A Serious Challenge for Girls' Education (Part 3)

By: Hamidullah Bamik

Cultural discrimination against women includes those differences of treatment that exist because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes, and behaviors towards women. The findings of the Special Rapporteur demonstrate that stereotype about women's role within the family leads to a division of labor within households that often result in poverty for women and lower levels of education. A stereotype is harmful when it limits women's capacity to enhance their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make decisions about their lives. The view that rearing children is women's responsibility, is a negative gender stereotype among the families and communities. Likewise, in Afghanistan, because of the predominant cultural and gender norms among the families and communities, boys' education in the majority of families is given priority to girls' education, or girls' education is not generally of interest or is acceptable merely for a limited period.

Women in Afghanistan are discriminated because of dominant beliefs of patriarchy from childhood, even before birth. And part of the reason that Afghan girls are experiencing severe gender discrimination is pertaining to the dominant discriminatory cultural norms among the communities in Afghanistan. They are born with discrimination and die with discrimination. Lack of public awareness of human rights standards, low levels of literacy, poverty, incorrect traditions, lack of laws that support the presence and participation of women in society are among the factors that increase discrimination and, as a result, deprive women of their rights and freedoms. According to Kristensen (2016), 70 % of the women whom the author interviewed said that they experienced discrimination in different manners. Many of the women whom the author interviewed had unique stories about their lives - how their brother was free to choose the education he wanted, while they were not permitted, either for economic reasons or because they had to get married instead. One of the stories that Kristensen cites from her interviewees is extremely shocking - "When I was little my parents had a bad financial situation. So, they just sent my brother to school, said you're a girl. Girls do not need to go to school, because, finally they do marry, and they don't need to learn." In a traditional country like Afghanistan, women and girls are suffering from gender discriminations against them that are mainly rooted in the cultural norms of their communities and the gender stereotypes of men toward women.

Girls' Education and the Dominated Patriarchal Codes: Social scientists define patriarchy as the power of man over women. They argue that patriarchy refers to males' ideology, privileges, and other principles are perceived for subjugating the females' roles and functions in the societies. Patriarchal societies are known for marginalizing the feminine. They typically ignore or trivialize what is concerned with feminine characteristics. Given the above definition, a country like Afghanistan that has a strong patriarchal attitude toward womanhood. In Afghanistan, because of the predominance of patriarchal attitudes and behaviour in families and communities, the power of patriarchy regulates all relationships by means of education, and it serves the interests of the patriarchal society. Therefore, equal opportunities for women and men are not provided in the social, political, economic, and educational spheres. Men can easily implement their projects in different areas, but women will face a lot of problems in the same arena. In the patriarchal society like Afghanistan, the cultural norms do not provide women with equal opportunities for gaining education and working outside the home. Thus, women are left marginalized. Since education as an important tool in the relationship of power, it can be the root stone of gender inequality in traditional society, and women are the main victims of this gender inequality. Afghanistan, as the country with the most patriotic power in the political, economic and social spheres,

some prevents and communities either by cultural means or on the basis of the patriarchal principles deprive girls from their basic human right - gaining education. Additionally, women are not counted as members of society as their men counterparts, and it has been embodied in some communities due to the control of education by patriarchal society. So, as education is an important tool that can question the values and norms of patriarchal society over the long term, communities' elders and family's decision makers (males) knowingly ignore girl's education.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Cultural barriers are one of the main obstacles to the growth and spread of girls' education in Afghanistan. A large part of these cultural norms is learned through the process of socialization that shapes our lives. In this context, one of the most important ways of development and transformation in each society is to challenge and ignore the norms that for various reasons are no longer responsive and meaningful for a group or stratum. Without breaking the norms of the old, the divine, the one-sided, the unequal and the incompatible with the style and the modern conditions of life in the contemporary world, the society is dying and ruining. The key to the dynamism and transformation of a society and culture is based on the critical and challenging approach toward the value systems and norms of that society. This process starts with the breakdown of the norm and ends with the transformation of values.

Studies and researches demonstrate that educating people can play a significant role in the transformation of cultural norms and rigid cultural values. Since in Afghanistan mostly girls are the victims of these rigid cultural norms, educating them can be one of the best and most effective ways to eliminate discrimination and gender inequalities. Because when girls gain education, skills, and, the capabilities required for their presence in the society, they can fight with the political, economic, social, gender, and educational inequalities in their living communities. The Afghan Ministry of Education as a responsible entity in providing education should pay close attention to the education and training of girls and women and provide special programs in this regard. These actions require that certain mechanisms should be created by the Ministry of Education and other relevant entities for fighting with the predominant rigid cultural norms that impede girls from gaining education. In addition to government responsible entities, educating girls is one of the best investments that families and communities themselves can make it happen because educated girls, for example, marry later, will have healthier children, earn more money that they invest back into their families and communities, and play more active roles in leading their communities and families.

All in all, the findings of the current research indicate that preventing girls from going to school on the basis of cultural norms prevailing in communities, been a major cause of child marriage, violence against women, discrimination against women and girls, and gender inequality in Afghanistan. Therefore, I would argue that Afghan families instead of halting their girls from going to school and keeping them at home, should fight with the predominant cultural norms that underlie their interpretation of girl's education. They should help their daughters obtain education so that they can help the other girls who may encounter the same fate in the future. Escaping from the problems either social problems, cultural problems, or economic is not a rational solution, instead, facing and fighting with them can help the entire communities to secure their well-being and development in the societies. Therefore, families should help their daughters gain education and provide them with equal opportunities as their sons.

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