

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



January 18, 2018

Approval of the Budget for the Year 1397

In an important development on Wednesday, January 17, the lower house of Afghan parliament – the Wolesi Jirga – approved the budget for the solar year 1397. It was essential for the budget to get through the parliament before the winter recess of 45 days, and fortunately, it was able to achieve success in this regard.

The new budget that has been announced is worth AFN 377.011 billion, which includes 266.133 billion as ordinary budget and AFN 110.878 billion as budget for development. The share of development budget in the total value seems ample; however, there needs to be remarkable measures taken before a larger portion of this amount is truly spent for development work within the country.

Though, the total budget seems sufficient as per the objective conditions, it is worthwhile to note that at least AFN 188 billion of the budget will be provided from international aid, while AFN 183 billion will be provided from the national revenues, which seems a bit discouraging and shows the level of dependence of Afghanistan on other countries regarding generation of revenues. The country needs to achieve great milestones before it is truly able to generate its own revenues and provide for most of its budget itself.

It is also important to note that there is a large difference between what is announced as the budget and what is actually spent for the purposes that they are announced. The development budget for the coming year seems promising, but it is vital that it should actually be spent. The historical facts and figures show that the different ministries in Afghanistan have not been able to spend the development budget properly. Moreover, the international community and international organizations, or even national NGOs have not been able to achieve their objectives. The recent report of Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) clearly showed how the development funds go astray in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, as a matter of fact, has failed to deliver maximum at times when the development is required the most and, in the process, has also lost some golden opportunities. Corruption has been lethal enough to annihilate the efforts or the plans to reconstruct the country and the different systems that may set it on the way to development. It should be noted that billions of dollars poured in the country for both military support and development projects. But if we analyze the socio-political and socio-economic scenario in the country the development does not seem as great as it should have been. Most of these aids were devoured by corruption instead of being spent for the intended purposes. Either the money that was to be spent through government or the NGO sector, both the ways corruption had the largest share. Afghanistan is ranked among the top ten most corrupt countries in the world. This is really tragic and shows that no considerable work has been done against corruption though it has been highlighted as a major problem throughout the last decade. And, it has had negative influences as well; particularly in the top governmental institutions. Corruption not only dominated the elections but also haunted different institutions; particularly, the government institutions, and brought bad name to the nation and at the same time financial loss; however, it has been left to dominate with vigor and strength. It has, in fact, victimized our society more than terrorism and insecurity and today if Afghanistan is not able to stand on its own, it is also because of the corruption.

In addition to this tragic situation, National Unity Government (NUG) has failed to deliver on ITS promises to carryout development work or fight corruption in the country. NUG, in its early days, promised to handle corruption with iron fists; however, that does not seem to be happening even after several years have passed. Many development projects are in limbo and there are concerns being raised by international organizations that assistance fund and support in Afghanistan are not being used for their intended purposes.

There seems to be no doubt in the fact that one of the basic reasons of the persistent rise in corruption in Afghanistan is the lack of commitment and honest efforts to control and eradicate this menace. Neither the previous government, nor the current government has shown real efforts to face it seriously. Therefore, the serpent has survived and has become reckless and out of control.

It is a real challenge now for the Afghan government to stand against it. However, a solid and dedicated effort against it can make a difference. It is not altogether impossible to defeat it. Definitely, strict measures are required, temperaments would be tested, institutions would be questioned, the powerful would have to be threatened, and more responsible attitude would be expected from all the people; in short, the whole mechanism would be shaken if there are real and honest efforts. And, it should be noted that there is no alternative for Afghanistan. The way it is going on would lead to chaos and instability. If the Afghan government is determined to realize development and complete the development goals, and spend the development budget in a proper manner, it must decide now and act accordingly.



Will Taliban's Preparation for Talks Lead to Peace?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The peace deadlock is likely to be broken with the Taliban's presence around negotiating table. Kabul government has constantly called warring parties, including the Taliban, to hold talks but the militants continued their insurgency killing combatants and non-combatants alike. The Taliban denied to participate in conferences on peace process and intensified their attacks against the Afghan government.

The issue of peace came to stalemate following the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was killed by the US drone in Baluchistan in 2016. This issue stalled the Quadrilateral Co-ordination Group (QCG), comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US, with triggering tension between Islamabad and Washington. On the other hand, the Taliban intensified their attacks in Afghanistan and showed no tendency to hold talks.

According to a report, the Taliban's political office in Qatar sent a delegation to Islamabad to consider the possibility of resuming peace talks with Kabul government. The report says that Islamabad sent a message to the Taliban's Qatar office through Mullah Muhammad Abbas, a senior Taliban leader, to hold talks with Kabul government. Pakistani officials further urged the clergy to persuade the Taliban to join peace process.

It is believed that Islamabad's pressure on the Taliban plays a crucial role in peace talks and bridges the gap between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghan officials have frequently hoped for the genuine involvement of Pakistan in peace process but Islamabad said that it has lost its leverage on the Taliban vowing to play its part.

After all, the relation between the US and Pakistan is beginning to thaw after hitting rock bottom with Donald Trump's harsh tweet against Pakistan claiming that Pakistan gave the US "lies and deceit". During her meeting in Islamabad, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Wells conveyed to her Pakistani interlocutors that the US wanted to shift to a "new relationship with Pakistan" based on "mutual interest". Wells had suggested to Pakistani officials that enhancing intelligence cooperation could provide the basis for improvement in ties, especially in counterterrorism cooperation, which is at the heart of the problems in their relations. The US diplomat emphasized that Washington opposed any effort to foment separatism inside Pakistan. "We do not support Balochi (sic) separatism," she said. She also stated

that the US would not support the use of Afghan soil as a base for hostile acts against Pakistan. While praising Islamabad's "extraordinary" fight against the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and Jamaatul Arhar, Wells said the US wanted similar efforts against groups trying to destabilize Afghanistan. She pointed out that Washington aimed to find a negotiated political settlement to Afghanistan. And that this was where the US expected Pakistan to play its role. She maintained that "all terrorist forces must be fought against," and "there can be no good or bad terrorists".

The decrease in trust deficit between the US and Pakistan will be constructive in peace talks. To build a mutual trust, Islamabad needs to nudge the Taliban to participate in negotiation of peace. So, the Taliban's delegation for holding talks is believed to be the result of Islamabad's pressure.

However, trusting the Taliban is a hard issue. Although it is said that the Taliban's political office in Qatar seeks to resume peace talks, the insurgency continues unabated in Afghanistan. In the past, the Taliban played a foul game and assassinated the head of Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani in 2011, which is against diplomatic acts. Now if the Taliban intend to resume peace talks, they will have to put an end to war and violence. Otherwise, the trip of Taliban's delegation to Islamabad seems no more than a political game void of bona fide intention. Thus, ceasing war is the first precondition for peace talks.

Bringing the Taliban to peace table does not necessarily mean to persuade them to stop violence and bloodshed. They might set unacceptable preconditions.

For example, the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from the country was one of the Taliban's preconditions in the past which was not acceptable for Kabul government. Secondly, there is no assurance if the Taliban keep their promise. During Hamid Karzai's administration, a large number of the Taliban's prisoners were released to meet their precondition for peace, but they returned to battlefields and peace remained elusive. To sum up, there is still no hope for peace talks for two reasons.

First, the Taliban have not decreased their insurgency in the country. Second, the Taliban played a foul game in the past and their presence in negotiation did not reduce militancy. The QCG needs to play its role to convince the Taliban to stop war and violence. If the Taliban outfit still seeks to play a foul game, military deal will be the only option.

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Power of Personal Development

Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Research shows that 95% of what we do or say in our daily lives is determined by our habits; that's why, it is very important to learn about success-creating habits and personality traits in order to get where we need to go. In the other words, the mighty people are not those who are good knower but good actors. Most achievements of the human society are the result of the initiatives of pragmatic personalities rather than retrogressive philosophers. For example, the changes created by Thomas Edison do not have roots in the great theories of philosophers such as Socrates and Plato.

The first, personal development strategy is to get used to doing job with prioritizing skills and try to apply the 80/20 principle both in your formal and informal life. When we facing our day, we first must ask ourselves what are the 20% of the things that we have to do that accounts for 80% of the value of our work. We would be amazed with the results of the increase of the productivities throughout the day and there is a direct correlation between productivity and the amount of self-confidence we have.

In clearer terms, we need to prioritize the top 20% of our works because there is never enough time in life to do everything but there is always enough time to do the important things. We always need to work on the top 20% of the items on our list that make up for the greatest amount of value whether it is what we accomplish at home or at your job. In fact, this is one of the best personal development tricks ever vastly used by successful people.

Human habits are trying to drag us to the easy and less value tasks but by using our wisdom, we must train ourselves (cultivate the habits) to concentrate on the hardest yet most valuable tasks if we really want to achieve the type of success that propels forward in life. In reality, it is the secret of all successful leaders; for instance, I remember the speech of popular president of United States, Barak Obama saying, "we do this job because this is not easy". Our leaders also need to remember this golden rule instead of being engulfed in ordinary activities.

The second personal development skill is goal oriented approach rather than being jack of all trades. Suppose, if we have been given a life and asked to live, what would be our first thought? The basic answer would be by doing what? what is proper for me during this lifetime to become? What is the road maps showing which mission is possible for my life? And these are the key focusing questions that set the basis for our lifelong goal! If we are unable to respond, we have no strategic goal and should not logical to expect any success.

But need to note that everybody in this world has a different set of circumstances, different set of skills, and a different set of opportunities through which they can interact with the world and identify their unique goal and sense

of fulfillment. Your mission in life should be to figure out what our unique, "sets" are and how you can take action to best capitalize on them that gives all of our efforts purpose and meaning.

The next personal development skill is time management which is really life management and crucial in accomplishing the tasks at hand. Time is the pivot of life activities and the greatest asset one can ever acquire. When you miss a second, you miss a time in your lifetime! "To mind your time, mind your thought! To mind your life, mind your time." That is why we need to make a to do list, when we make a list, it is like giving yourself a blueprint of things that must be done.

Also, we need to be aware of time dragons of the day such as face-book, twitter, instant messengers and other texting devices as they are the biggest addictive time wasters. In fact, they are the termite-like thieves which vitiate the most valuable asset and energy of young generation. Unfortunately, these vastly used in Afghanistan including in government and non-government offices, but most destructively in schools and universities. Millions of students are steeped in using social media network; as soon as they get up, they give priority to using Facebook or twitter even if the assignments are pending for several days.

In addition, public media such as national and international T.V channels broadcast violence and time-killing movies which has negative social and psychological effects on children. One may see many children who use the freestyle wrestling actions on streets, at schools and also at homes on smaller children. Likewise, there are various family conflicts learnt from violent scenes broadcasted by unsupervised channels.

To sum up, the most important personal development skill that you may keep in mind is to concentrate on the top important tasks tailored to the long-term goals and thus the valuable way of spending time. Farther more, cultivation of a personal thinking habit, taking a few minutes to think before every idea you express, before every phone call you make, and before every task to decide so as to answer you what result you want to attain.

On the other hand, you have to think, think, think and then do not think. Means, need to free ourselves from all success barriers such as chains of fear, doubt, and negativity. There is never 100% ideal way of reaching our goals, so you need to be more pragmatic rather than being hesitant idealists. Finally, all three skills are interconnected but the time management skills and prioritizing skills are like tools for goal setting skill. So, if we fail to have a realistic and measurable goal, we will fail to apply both aforementioned skills.

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