

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



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Rampant Rise in Population

A state cannot exist without population and, at the same time, the size of population greatly influences the nation. In today's societies, the size of population has to be maintained as per the resources of the state because the larger population does not always bring prosperity. There are many examples wherein the states do not have enough resources as per their large population and, therefore, they suffer. It is important to manage the population and try to keep it under control, otherwise, it may give rise to different sorts of problems which would prove to be a hurdle in the way of development and progress of the nation. Therefore, if a country has enough resources to support large population it may keep that population, but states that cannot support larger populations should limit their population, or else, they will suffer from different types of economic and social problems.

Afghanistan is one of the same sorts of countries that suffer from myriads of economic and social problems. Severe poverty prevails in most parts of country because of continuous wars and natural catastrophes. The political and economic infrastructures are almost non-existent. In such circumstances Afghanistan is having a considerable population. The number of people living in Afghanistan at the moment is more than 28 million, which is just a rough estimate.

As a matter of fact, this number is deduced from an earlier census that was half-finished, and does not represent Afghan population correctly. The actual number may be more than the one mentioned above. It has been one of the greatest misfortunes of the country that there has not been any comprehensible scientific population census in the country, which is really necessary for better political, social and economic decision making. It is really difficult to administer a population without knowing its composition correctly.

Regrettably, the population growth rate in Afghanistan has been in elevation, as well. The rate for Afghanistan, according to the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) is 2.4 percent. If the same rate retains the population in the country will be doubled within three decades. Currently if it is accepted that the population of Afghanistan is around 28 million, in 2025 it may reach to more than 34 million. This clearly indicates the serious nature of the growth taking place in the country. Definitely, this growth rate is going to test the capabilities of Afghan resources and Afghan government in the times to come.

The most dominant reason behind the rapid population growth in Afghanistan is that the people are not cognizant of the issue at all. Most of them consider children as the blessing and never ever think that they can turn into curse if not nourished properly and there are not enough resources to feed them, educate them and make them responsible members of the society. Ill-fatedly, most of the people in the country do not know that many of the problems that prevail in their personal lives and in the country are linked to unchecked population growth.

Especially, the people belonging to the remote areas of the country do not understand what their basic right and responsibilities are. It is, therefore, impossible to expect from them to have right understanding of the issue. Unfortunately, even the well-educated people in the urban areas do not deliberate on this issue completely. One of the greatest troubles with the Afghan society is that it has been vehemently dominated by strict tribal norms and values and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

Therefore, most of the people consider it against their traditional norms or religious teachings to have a family planning. They consider it a sin to go for birth control. There have been many occasions when such endeavors have been opposed violently. Furthermore, the rise in health facilities has been able to control the mortality rate to a certain extent, which would ultimately have effect on the growth rate.

Apart from that there are financial barriers that restrict the families to go for a luxury, like birth control. People thrive for their basic requirements like food, cloth and shelter; how should they cogitate about the problem which they consider very much supplementary in nature?

Population growth rate in our country has been unchecked and can really lead to numerous problems. The government in this regard has to take serious and practical steps to control the issue as soon as possible. There should be intensive awareness programs for the people as a whole. Such programs should rather be started from the college and university level, wherein the citizens must be given complete understanding of threats that can be faced because of unchecked population growth. As far as the remote areas are considered, the endeavors must be doubled as in such areas it is not just about communicating the message to the families; rather the endeavors must go through strict and narrow-minded tribal norms and religious teachings.

Unemployment Crisis!

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Though unemployment is a common issue that affects many countries, and to a larger extent the least developed nations and causes widespread poverty, social unrest, and one of the major reasons for insurgency in some countries, including Afghanistan. Afghanistan comes in the list of top 20 countries with high unemployment where the unemployment rate is estimated around 40%. Slow and volatile GDP (Gross Domestic Product), low rate of investment, lack of government support to private sector, high population growth rate, repatriation of millions of migrants, lack of security, limited access to education, quality of education are some of the factors that have contributed to the high unemployment rate in the country. Afghanistan is one of the countries with low HDI (Human Development Index); the literacy rate is below 36%. The literacy is reported to be 32% in men and only 13% in women.

Economic activities extremely decreased and it is said that Twelve million Afghans earn less than 45 cents a day. Agriculture, which is the second largest contributor to GDP growth, after services, unprecedentedly declined and put continuous upward pressure on poverty, declining job opportunities and growing social disorders. The currency exchange rate enormously depreciated against US dollar while the goods price's tremendously increased against Afghani Currency. On the one hand, foreign aid inflows have decline, which makes foreign currency more valuable vis-à-vis the Afghani. On the other hand, growing uncertainty around the political and security environment have caused demand for Afghani to decline; both through consumer's preference to retain their savings in US dollar, and through lower capital inflows which naturally increase demand for foreign currency.

CSO (Central Statistic Office) figures show about 12 million people qualify as workers in the country. But The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have new figures that show about 7 million people need to find full-time work. Approximately Sixty percent of Afghan workers are jobless, and those who are employed rarely have the assurance of regular working hours in a safe environment while their average monthly wages are not crossing the ceiling of 5,000 Afs, which is below a sustenance levels.

Growing joblessness among the youth is fuelling internal displacement, illegal immigration and insecurity. The worsening violence and economic situation have forced hundreds of families to move to other parts of the country and abroad. After Syria and Iraq, with 68,000 migrants Afghanistan got third place in the world in 2015. Many of them had sold their major properties such house, shop or vehicle because of lack of job prospects and worsening poverty. And now the hopelessness is rising to finding regular work and fear for their safety because of the violence caused by continuing war in the country.

In fact, there is a strong correlation between large numbers of unemployed cohorts and political violence. When young people - particularly young men - are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated, and have few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence such as the Taliban. Widespread youth unemployment carries effects beyond the individuals who can not find jobs. The consequences can threaten a nation's wider economy and stability. The implications of these high rates are devastating for the country's economy and stability. Afghanistan has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. More than 11 million Afghans over the age of 15 cannot read or write. These young illiterate Afghans have no better alternatives for the high unemployment in the country but to migrate or to join the insurgent groups.

Unemployment in Afghanistan is destructive for its economy and security conditions. Lack of jobs in the country has led thousands of young Afghan migrating to the neighboring countries, where they can be abused, exploited, tortured, trafficked, addicted and humiliated.

Labor migration has possibly created a remittance dependent economy. However, those jobless teenagers who actually can not meet the expense of escaping the unemployment remain in the country and relocate from one region to another where they can find jobs. This is the group of people who are endangering the security situation of Afghanistan. According to the interviews, surveys, and reports done by different media, and international institutions, most of these emigrants start to either return back to their farmlands or join the Taliban extremist groups. There are those who are willing to farm agricultural crops, but due to food aid inflow that lowered the price of agricultural products, they are unable to compete in the market. The best alternative they have is opium poppy. Opium production is fueling the insurgents, and flaming the instability in the country. It is a lucrative crop compare to any other product that the farmers can grow. However, Taliban and other extremist groups smuggle opium to neighboring countries and sell it at a higher price. This trade is the most beneficial and earns high revenue for the insurgents. The revenue is empowering the enemy of Afghanistan in fighting against the foreign and domestic troops. Unemployment is a very useful recruiting tool for the Taliban to engage the Afghan youths in the fight against the government and its people. According to media reports jobless and uneducated young people in Afghanistan have few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence such as the Taliban. Unemployment has a positive effect on the rise of violence in Afghanistan.

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Where Europe Still Lives

By Erik Berglof

The outcome of the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum shocked populations across Europe. But watching the response in Lviv, in Western Ukraine - a hub of enthusiasm about the European Union - was particularly jarring.

At a time when irresponsible opportunists and populists in the UK are taking a wrecking ball to their country's own institutions, and those of Europe, Ukrainian reformers are trying to build something new. Whereas the UK's "Leave" campaign peddled trumped-up dangers from immigration to make its case, activists in Ukraine are facing very real threats as they work toward a civil-society framework that can stand up to internal pressure from the oligarchs and external influence from Russia.

Historically, Lviv, perhaps more than any city, reminds us of Europe's capacity to self-destruct. Around its picturesque squares, every cobblestone and ornamental façade has borne silent witness to the bloodletting that accompanied empires' rise and fall. Yet Lviv is also where one can find hope for the promise of Europe.

Lviv is a deeply anti-Russian and pro-European city; but, for five days each summer, it hosts the Alpha Jazz Festival, sponsored by a Russian bank. At a time when Russia and Ukraine are still very much at war, policymakers, local citizens, members of the Ukrainian diaspora, and even some Russians pack the streets of Lviv to celebrate world-class jazz.

Beyond its vital cultural life and geographical location, Ukraine is strategically important to the West. It is a key front in the global confrontation between democracy and autocracy. For Europe, it represents a unique opportunity to promote the rule of law, transparency, free trade, and good governance beyond its borders.

Ukraine is a large country, with ample human capital, natural resources, and growth potential in many sectors. More important, successful reforms in Ukraine make positive developments in Russia more likely. Still, Ukraine's economy has shrunk by two-thirds (in dollar terms) since 2006, making it the poorest country in Europe.

After the 2014 ouster of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, the European dream suddenly seemed less remote for many Ukrainians, who had hoped for visa-free travel and employment opportunities in the EU sometime in the near future. With the Brexit vote, that hope is now diminished, as is a European model that has long inspired societies emerging from the post-Soviet fog. There was a palpable sense of despair and disbelief among Ukrainians enjoying jazz in Lviv as they watched Europe self-destruct once again.

Brexit gives the forces of autocracy an undeserved boost. Europe's ability to project soft power is weakened, as is its ap-

petite to do so. The benefits of a post-Arab Spring and post-European world are not lost on its dictators, who can now rest easier.

Still, there is reason for hope. Meaningful reforms in Ukraine can still succeed, and more has been achieved in the last two years than was accomplished in the preceding 20. For starters, the economy has at least stabilized, and the fighting in the east has receded.

Ukraine's current prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman, is committed to pushing through additional reforms to combat corruption, including abolishing energy subsidies and shifting to a more transparent monetary policy (from exchange-rate targeting to inflation targeting).

To the east, Russia's economy is suffering from low energy prices and Western sanctions, neither of which will change any time soon. Even without these external conditions, Russia's economy was plagued by rising costs and a lack of productivity growth. But at least some close to the inner circle of Russia's leadership have hinted at a new willingness to discuss matters of regional or global concern.

To the west, the EU can still regain its composure, provided it moves quickly to resolve the current post-Brexit uncertainty. If it succeeds in this, it can pursue investment opportunities in Ukraine and southeast Europe that stand to replenish its political capital and renew its productivity growth.

The EU should recognize Brexit as an opportunity to move forward with its own fundamental reforms, which have stalled in part because of UK opposition. Opinion polls show that EU citizens understand the need for a Europe-wide framework to control the financial sector (particularly cross-border banking), manage refugee flows, and implement measures to fight climate change and mitigate its effects.

For the citizens of Lviv, the European project provides a model not only for rebuilding their own society, but also for joining something bigger. That larger vision is one the UK's "Remain" campaign, with the notable exception of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's "Lead - Not Leave" speech, did not offer to its own constituency. Even pro-Europeans in the UK questioned if it was worth voting to remain, given such weak engagement by the UK government in leading the EU. What the UK needed - and still needs - is a vision, put to the people, of how to make itself better by making the EU better.

As Ukrainian reformers bravely continue to build new institutions, they are looking to the EU, and especially to the UK, for blueprints. One hopes that we will someday look to Lviv - where every citizen feels a sense of ownership over every stone - for inspiration as well. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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