

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



June 22, 2019

Women's Key Role in Social and Political Life

Afghan women played a highly significant role in social, political, and economic arenas and continue their active participation in all these sectors after being entitled equally in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. Although traditional culture, tribal code of conduct, and radical mindset hampered the activities of women in collective life, they made great achievements.

To better understand the role of Afghan women in collective life, one needs to view the history. For instance, the role of Queen Soraya Tarzi is very prominent in Afghanistan's history. Soraya worked actively to liberate Afghan women, grant them their rights, and encourage them to participate in nation building. She set up the first women's hospital and girl's school in the country. As minister of education, she arranged to send 18 young women to Turkey to seek higher education in 1928.

Speaking at the seventh anniversary of Afghanistan's independence, she is cited as saying, "It (independence) belongs to all of us and that is why we celebrate it. Do you think, however, that our nation from the outset needs only men to serve it? Women should also take their part as women did in the early years of our nation and Islam. From their examples we must learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation and that this cannot be done without being equipped with knowledge. So, we should all attempt to acquire as much knowledge as possible, in order that we may render our services to society in the manner of the women of early Islam."

Moreover, the 18-year-old Afghan national heroine Malalai of Maiwand - who rallied local people fighters against the British troops at the 1880 Battle of Maiwand - will be kept alive in the heart of Afghan history for her heroic act and considered as a role model. She was a native of Khig, a tiny village on the edge of the Maiwand battlefield, and the daughter of a shepherd. Like many women, Malalai was there to help the wounded and provide water and spare weapons. Eventually there came a point in the battle where the Afghan army was losing morale in Battle of Maiwand. Malalai took the Afghan flag and addressed them by an epic poem as, "Young love! If you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand, by God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame." This gave many of the Afghan fighters and ghazis a new resolve and they redoubled their efforts. At that moment one of the leading flag-bearers fell from a British bullet, Malalai went forward and held up the flag singing heroic song as, "With a drop of my sweetheart's blood, shed in defense of the motherland, will I put a beauty spot on my forehead, such as would put to shame the rose in the garden."

But then Malalai herself was struck down and killed in cold blood. However, her words had spurred on her countrymen and soon the British lines gave way, broke and turned, leading to a disastrous retreat back to Kandahar and the biggest defeat for the British army in the Second Afghan War. Afterwards, Ayub Khan, the king who led the Battle of Maiwand, gave a special honor to Malalai and she was buried at her village, where her grave can still be found. Indeed, her actions were enough to turn her into a national heroine where she is still revered today. Schools, hospitals and even a women's magazine have been named after her.

The aforementioned facts show that Afghan women played essential role through the history in social and political life sowing the seeds of courage for their next generations.

Currently, one cannot deny the key role of women in social and political life. Afghan women have highly constructive part in all sectors. Their participation is prominent in elections both as voters and candidates, in schools and universities as instructors and learners, and other daily activities. It is believe that if women's are marginalized from collective activities and the said arenas, Afghanistan will sustained the most serious damage it has ever had.

The historical role of women should not be considered unheard-of and their current part should not be downplayed. The Afghan government needs to pave the ground for greater role of women and empower them further.

Meanwhile, Afghan women have to take more active part in nation building and social activities. If women do not support their male counterparts in collective life, the progress will be seriously hampered.



The G20 in Osaka

By: Shinzo Abe

On June 28, I will host the 2019 G20 summit in Osaka. Our agenda will focus on three key issues, each of which is particularly important for Asia.

The first agenda item concerns what I believe is the most important challenge of our times: working to maintain and ultimately strengthen the international order for free and fair trade. For Asia's leaders, this means forging the RCEP, or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, an advanced free-trade agreement between the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the six Indo-Pacific states (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand).

Those discussions have gone on for some time. We must now make a dash toward the goal line.

The second item on the agenda concerns the digital economy. Digitalization of the economy has enabled unique and unprecedented business models, but it has also brought new challenges, such as double non-taxation for multinational companies. We can resolve such issues only through international cooperation.

The data traveling instantaneously around the world are indifferent to national boundaries. I believe that the economic and social impact of such data will rival, even surpass, the roles that petroleum and the internal combustion engine played in the twentieth century.

By its nature, data easily overcomes physical obstacles. Networked, its effects and advantages multiply and then multiply further. Conversely, should the equivalent of even a single closed-off room appear anywhere, the resulting losses extend to the entire network.

Japan is advocating a system of "Data Free Flow with Trust," or "DFFT," an approach that attempts to allow the free flow of data under rules upon which all can rely. So let us prepare rules that allow the digital economy's benefits to spread to everyone in Asia and around the world. The process for doing that is what we call the "Osaka Track," which we hope to launch at the upcoming summit.

It goes without saying that points one and two - trade and data - are inseparable from reform of the World Trade Organization. A quarter-century has passed since the WTO was established. During that time, the world economy has changed at amazing speed. But the WTO has failed to keep up, and the adverse effects of this are becoming increasingly apparent.

What should we do to make the WTO relevant again as a guardian of free and fair international trade?

The great supply chains driving the global economy for many years now are anchored in the ASEAN region. The region's economies have benefited from an environment in which people and goods flow in and out freely. It is precisely this freedom that accounts for ASEAN's dynamism and growing prosperity.

The third issue for the Osaka summit is the importance of innovation in tackling global environmental challenges. The goals outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's "1.5°C report" are not achievable through regulation alone. Disruptive innovation that flips something negative into something positive will be the key to realizing the world's climate goals.

Consider carbon dioxide, which in recent years has been treated entirely as a

villain. But how wonderful would it be if CO2 were to become a "resource" available at the very lowest price and available in the greatest abundance! Innovative technologies like artificial photosynthesis are certain to make such dreams a reality one day. In Osaka, I want the G20 to confirm the importance of such innovation. And in October, Japan will hold a Green Innovation Summit, bringing together under one roof leading researchers and representatives of industrial and financial circles from all around the world. We hope to tap the world's wisdom and usher in a sustainable future with one great push.

On March 6, I received six recommendations from the members of "Science20," which was created by the national science academies of the G20 countries. In order to reduce threats to marine ecosystems and conserve marine environments, the final two recommendations urge the "establishment of an improved data storage and management system that ensures open access by scientists globally," and the "sharing of information gained through research activities carried out under extensive and multinational collaboration, to expedite a comprehensive understanding of the global ocean and its dynamics." It is precisely for this reason that we must ensure DFFT and turn data into public goods for scientists worldwide.

The G20 summit in Osaka is coming at the dawn of a new era - Reiwa ("beautiful harmony") - in Japan. On April 30 the world witnessed the abdication by His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus Akihito, the first abdication by a reigning emperor in 202 years. The following day, His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito was enthroned. The sense of delight among the Japanese was overflowing, and I could not have imagined in advance the kindness of the sentiments I received from abroad.

Some commented, "The 'rei' in the name 'Reiwa' has such a nice ring to it." They pointed out that the pronunciation was the same as the word "ray" in such phrases as "a ray of hope" or "a ray of sunshine."

"I see it now," I said to myself as their words sunk in, and I thought that the sound's positive nuance was icing on the cake. Those sentiments remind me of something I saw when visiting the town of Okuma in Fukushima Prefecture, the town that is home to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which became the site of an environmental disaster in 2011.

An evacuation order that had been in place for residents across the entirety of Okuma for years was partly lifted on April 10, and four days later, on April 14, a ceremony was held to open the newly constructed town office. I participated in the ceremony, and there I met a young woman, Aki Sato. She had come from Tokyo after the disaster, wanting to see the situation with her own eyes and do anything she could to help.

It wasn't long before she married a local man, and she is now a resident of Okuma. She urged me to take a look at the red windbreaker she was wearing. The message on the back appeared in white in skillfully written Japanese: "If you have time to look back, then move forward instead."

All Japanese are continuing to move forward, exchanging with each other those words of encouragement.

That positive attitude was a way of life for the generations of postwar Japanese who brought about our rapid economic growth. By the 1980's, that attitude had spread across the ASEAN region. Now it is a way of life for broader Asia - that is, for the entire Indo-Pacific. And I firmly believe that a self-confident Japan is a Japan that is well-suited to contribute to creating Asia's future.

Shinzo Abe is Prime Minister of Japan

Afghan Peace Process: Home Grown Solution Holds the Future

By: Srimal Fernando and Jalal Shams

Since October 2018, the US and Taliban negotiators held six rounds of direct peace talks in Qatar's capital Doha. Any Peace process has some key aspects which are vital for its success. In the present context, the Afghan Peace process provided an opportunity to keep Taliban engaged on matters of shared concern for ending Afghanistan's internal conflict that undermine stability. There are some positive signs of a breakthrough in the stalled peace process in creating opportunities for conflict containment. Led by U.S. special envoy for peace in Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad leading the US effort to facilitate dialogue and negotiate with Taliban was a matter of debate within Afghanistan's political circles. Unfortunately, for the clarity any future peace agreement benefiting of all parties of the Afghan society excluded the association of the Afghan government seems to be the blank spot in resolving this puzzle from the six rounds of US, Taliban peace talks in Doha. Therefore the negotiating position of relevant actors on the most silent issues of Afghan peace process need to take more transparent approach to solve the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan.

Assessing the perspective of Afghanistan stability based on its own distinctive historical account and the external factors that either constitute or undermine the prospects of permanent peace should be meaningfully debated for the future stability of Afghanistan. There is a widespread perception among domestic and international foreign policy makers that the domestic political nature of the peace process is the fundamental piece in understanding Afghanistan's internal insurrections that stems from variety of political, regional, ideological or inequality related reasons that needs cooperation between the conflicting parties. Obviously, the US has been among the driving forces behind the peace talks in Qatar. It is undeniable that the representation of President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani administration remains excluded outsider as the six rounds of direct peace talks unfolded in Doha between the US and Taliban negotiators. In response to the uncertainties over the US led peace talks the incumbent Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani running for a second term in a presidential elections said "Afghans do not accept an interim government not today, not tomorrow, not in a hundred years," (New York times, 2019) Hopefully having made the point, the Afghan government remain important actor in the ongoing peace process. Looking back at historical peace initiatives during the past there were several determined efforts by past and present governments of Afghanistan to resolve the matter through home-grown political solution of ending the Afghan insurrection. However some Peace efforts in the past were in jeopardy due to democratic and external interferences. Knowing more about the past mistakes the far-sighted wise statement by incumbent Afghan President Ghani's statement we want peace quickly, we want it soon, but we want it with prudence," and "Prudence is important so we do not repeat past mistakes." (New York Times, January 2019). Therefore negotiators at the Doha Peace talks have to acknowledge to develop a peace deal involving several actors. There has been running debate since the absence of Afghanistan government in the peace process.

Whether the presence of Afghan government in a US led peace talk with

Taliban would better severe if they participated is an important argument taking place at regional level at the moment. Hence, it is important to recognize what Afghan government needs to preserve in stabilizing and in the interests of all parties. However U.S. military is expected reduce some of the 14,000 soldiers and the 8,000 troops from 38 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and non-NATO countries in the coming years. On the other hand frequent changes in policies concerning the Afghan peace process to end the eighteen-year war not only brings instability to the Afghanistan but also creates uncertain times for US-Afghanistan relations. Yet, in the light of analysis for the US, there are two key issues for negotiating with the Taliban One is by ensuring that renewed 9/11-style attacks cannot originate from Afghan territory and secondly complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

At the onset when Taliban refused to join the current system, they made it clear that they would not simply 'join' or be 'integrated' into the current system and lay down their arms, as this would be surrender for them, and they instead demand 'reform', including a new constitution drafted by "Afghan (religious) scholars and intellectuals. Noticeably the withdrawal of US led foreign troops from Afghanistan is one of the Taliban's key demands in peace negotiations. Details revealed during the Doha talks Sher Muhammad Abbas Stanikzai, head of the Doha office and a former Taliban deputy foreign minister making a statement in reference to US troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Abbas Stanikzai said "We have told them that after ending your military intervention, we will welcome U.S. engineers, doctors and others if they want to come back for reconstruction of Afghanistan," he said. "And they have promised to do so. (Voice of America January 2019) January 30, 2019). In this sense, the foreign policy positioning of United States (US), with Western alliance and other major stakeholders in the region particularly India Pakistan, Iran and China having a multilateral agenda's influencing Afghanistan's future are areas of foreign policy concerned that need attention. Beyond this a broadening south Asian regional support led by institutional context driven by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can bring a regional solution to the Afghan crisis. It is important to recognize most salient consequences of the troubling realities that require socio, economic solutions. The reduction of the degree of dependence on external partners to bring about domestic solutions to internal problems is an essential factor. Thus these remedies plus home grown political solution with all parties of the Afghan society should be a possibility to test those factors that are able to change Afghanistan's future while moving forward.

This opinion piece gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Afghanistan Government.

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