

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



June 29, 2015

The Road to Good Governance

Recently, there have been debates, in national and international circles, regarding Afghan government and its ability to deal with the challenges within the country. However, it has been observed that Afghan government has not been able to offer even elementary necessities of life to majority of its people and have not been able to search for fitting resolution to various political problems that influence the system to a great extent. There has been a tag of corruption and it is said that it does not have the potential to accomplish good governance. Even though, the international community on different occasions has highlighted that their assistance is conditioned on the basis of good governance, hitherto there has not been key steps carried out by Afghan government to formulate achievements in this regard. More than eleven years of support and assistance seems to have gone without success and the country still suffers from myriads of evils.

The capacity of good governance is reviewed by its potential to present the basic necessities of life to the people effortlessly and readily. In addition, it must attempt to elevate the standard of living of the masses. Government stands as one of the most significant actors in good governance. It is the government that chooses whether good governance is realized or not. There are certain important characteristics that must be achieved so as to create it. Good governance has to be participatory, consensus-oriented, answerable, transparent, approachable, effective and efficient, equitable and all-encompassing and pursues the rule of law.

Good governance strives that there should be partaking of all the important groups of the society within the decision making process and must engage both men and women. Participation could be either direct or through lawful intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to indicate that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most susceptible in society would be taken into deliberation in decision-making. Participation needs to be knowledgeable and structured. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. Unluckily, in our country Afghanistan the decision-making is not carried out through proper participation of the representatives of the people. In reality, the decision making process is very much centralized.

An imperative characteristic of good governance is that it is consensus oriented. There are numerous actors and diverse opinions in a given society. Good governance requires arbitration of the different interests in society to reach a wide consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be acquired. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to acquire the goals of such development.

This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community. Afghan government has not been able to build up a strong consensus and the ruling class does not seem much worried about any sort of consensus.

Accountability is a key obligation of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders.

Afghan government, conversely, has been formed in such a manner that it is complicated to hold the Presidential Office accountable for its policies and actions. It can do whatever it wants without standing accountable to its people. As a matter of fact accountability can be acquired when there is transparency and the rule of law.

Nonetheless, both these characteristics seem to be non-existent in Afghan society. Transparency and rule of law can be maintained when there is proper segregation of power and the different organs of state can function on their own. In effect, judiciary and law enforcement agencies must be competent to hold the law as the top priority theme. In Afghan political system the separation of powers is not clear and the judiciary is not capable enough to pressure the Cabinet in true sense. Furthermore, the powerful and the rich are mostly considered above the law and the poor and weak have to go through the 'quagmire of law and order system'.

Good governance requires that institutions and processes attempt to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. It means that it should be approachable. In the same way it should also ensure equity and inclusiveness. A society's wellbeing depends on ensuring that all its members sense that they have a stake in it and do not feel barred from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to get better or maintain their well-being but what Afghan government has to offer us is the disregard for the most vulnerable. The minority groups in reality endure from lack of proper participation in decision-making and they find their existence in jeopardy within the society. Good governance also means that processes and institutions generate results that meet the needs of society while making the best of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable utilization of natural resources and the protection of environment.

It is correct that all the characteristics mentioned above cannot be acquired by a government or a society as they depict what an ideal governance must hold, but it is also true that there are many nations in the world that, to a gratifying extent, have achieved most of them. Thus, Afghan government has to make endeavors to achieve these characteristics if it really wants to achieve good governance honestly and it desires to serve its people in a superior manner.

Hatred Begets Hatred

By Dilawar Sherzai

It can be observed in our today's world that there has been increase in the negative energy displayed by human beings in different forms. The worst of its types can be found in the prevailing hatred among human beings based on different ideas and concepts. Some of them are because of simple jealousy; others may be because of nationalistic sentiments, religious differences and ideological parities. There are many occasions when these manifestations of hatred turn into ugly wars; then what follows is never hidden from any one.

It is a fact that no two human beings are alike. There are differences among them and the same can be said about the two or more groups of people as well. As they belong to different socio-political circumstances, they are bound to be different. These differences may result into disagreements and anger as well. And, on certain occasions these disagreements become necessary for the positive evolution of the society. If there is no disagreement there is no improvement. But the situation becomes worse when the disagreements and anger turn into hatred. It can be found that they can take many shapes; an inarticulate mumble of discontent, tears of frustration, scream of rage, confident roar of unease, confusion, a longing, a critical vibration and antagonism and all these can only be hurdles in the way of conquering the world with love and affection and making it a better place to live, as wonderfully explained by C. JoyBell C., "Anger is like flowing water; there's nothing wrong with it as long as you let it flow. Hate is like stagnant water; anger that you denied yourself the freedom to feel, the freedom to flow; water that you gathered in one place and left to rot. Stagnant water becomes dirty, stinky, disease-ridden, poisonous, deadly; that is your hate. On flowing water travels little paper boats; paper boats of forgiveness. Allow yourself to feel anger, allow your waters to flow, along with all the paper boats of forgiveness. Be human."

It is really unfortunate to note that during the last century in course of three decades, there were two major world wars; even now, many years after the Second World War, there is lack of amity and friendliness among the nations of the world. Have a glance at the contemporary socio-political scenario, the facts will be revealed easily. Consider the situation in our own country Afghanistan. The hatred among our people has reached to such a degree that people are ready to kill themselves in order to quench the thirst of revenge against others. Have a look at the situation in Middle East and Africa. The wars and instability have proved the fact that human beings do not have any feeling of humanity and kindness for each other. Analyze the growing competition among the nations of the world regarding the mad race of nuclear weapons. All

these examples clearly show that we are no more possessing the quality that distinguishes us from other creatures - the quality of sane mind and humane feelings. At the same time we are wasting our energy by following hatred, which in Haruki Murakami's view is like a two-edged sword. When you cut the other person, you cut yourself. The more violently you hack at the other person, the more violently you hack at yourself. It can often be fatal. But it is not easy to dispose of.

In such a scenario, it is difficult to imagine that human beings will use their immense power of love and belongingness? At present, nations of the world have plans to use their great power for destruction but this cannot go on; human beings should not be so mad to end their lives with their own hands. They need to ponder carefully and they have to come up with better decisions. If they persist on their present course and continue to send out destructive vibration of in-harmony, antagonism, hatred, selfishness and greed instead of the constructive vibration of brotherhood and cooperation. More and more people will forget their souls and care about their bodies. The greatest sin and corruption will reign on earth. There will be terrible battle among all people of the world. The sea will become red. The earth and the bottom of the sea will be strewn with bones. The nations and the states will be scattered. The human species would be extinct. Such hunger, disease and crime, as never seen before, will prevail in the world. The filthy roads will be covered with crowds wandering from one place to another. The entire world will be devastated and there will be only night and death and screaming of some innocent people.

The scream implies an anguished enthusiasm for changing the world. But how can we do it? What can we do to make the world a better place? What can we do to put an end to all the misery and exploitation? There is an answer ready at hand. We can do it by eliminating hatred that we have for the fellow beings. For that we do not need to strive to discover some golden rules; rather we have to turn to our true nature. Our true nature is really innocent and possesses great love and warmth for other human beings and, in fact, for the entire universe. All we need to do is to clean our conscience and nature from the filthy ideas and concepts that generate abhorrence and hatred. As Martin Luther King Jr. had said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." And a similar dictum came from Buddha, "Those who attempt to conquer hatred by hatred are like warriors who take weapons to overcome others who bear arms. This does not end hatred, but gives it room to grow. But, ancient wisdom had advocated a different timeless strategy to overcome hatred. This eternal wisdom is to meet hatred with non-hatred. The method of trying to conquer hatred through hatred never succeeds in overcoming hatred. But, the method of overcoming hatred through non-hatred is eternally effective. That is why that method is described as eternal wisdom."

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Afghanistan's Formidable Challenges

By Hujjatullah Zia

The militancy in Afghanistan is raging once again. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are overwhelmed by the growing number of Taliban attacks across the country and in major cities, particularly Kabul. Attack on the Afghan parliament has an important political significance because the insurgents could have paralyzed the country's symbolic centre of power. Similarly, the economic stagnation and poor administration have compounded the challenges.

On June 23, all of the main state bodies in Afghanistan lost their constitutional basis. The Afghan Parliament's term ended on June 22 with no new parliament in line to replace it due to the government's failure to hold elections this past April. The executive branch, led by the National Unity Government, also lacks constitutional mandates, as the new government - the public believe - was the product of a political deal rather than a formal electoral process.

The Supreme Court, the attorney general's office, and the Constitutional Oversight Commission are all currently run by acting heads. A constitutional crisis is quickly descending upon the country as it faces an immense security challenge in the Taliban's nationwide "spring offensive". On top of this already shaky foundation, the country's debilitating economic stagnation can only further aggravate its constitutional, political, and security crises.

People live in a pathetic state. The security crisis and economic stagnation have paralyzed their life. The simple individuals are the main victims of conflicts carried out by the Taliban militants. As a result, a large number of families have been displaced internally from restive parts of the country. Moreover, the larger part of the country suffers from unemployment and economic challenges. The current economic slumps embitter not only the old men - who sweat from dawn to dusk to make the ends meet - but also the businessmen. After all, abducting, threatening and killing national investors and businessmen for money, discourage them from investing in the country.

With the influence of the militants, the women would be the first to be preyed upon. As a result, the Islamic State groups have warned women in Nangarhar province through releasing a notice not to get out of their homes unless having necessary tasks - reports say. It is publicly known that Afghan women suffered bitterly under the Taliban regime. They were bereft of their rights to freedom, education, etc. For example, the school doors were closed for the girls. However, the Islamic State groups have surpassed the Taliban in extremism and radical stereotypes - this fact was confessed by the Taliban's senior leader Aymen al-Zawahiri with the very emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the women would suffer worse if the IS affiliated groups dominate any parts of the country. Due to political wheeling and dealing, corruption parallels other

challenges. Throughout the past 13 years, high levels of corruption and bad governance have seriously thwarted the international community's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Millions of dollars that were allocated for the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan were misused or wasted.

Despite the lofty promises of the National Unity Government's heads during their presidential campaigns, little progress has been made, and Afghanistan remains at the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.

According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), corruption remains one of the major impediments to the stabilization and reconstruction process in Afghanistan.

An alarming report was recently published by SIGAR on the Ministry of Education's falsification of data. Some senior officials from the ministry had deliberately fabricated data and statistics on the country's number of schools and teachers in order to steal international funding, diverting it from the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. In fact, millions of US taxpayer dollars have paid for fake schools and ghost teachers in Afghanistan.

"Until now, the Afghan government and the donor community have tried hard to curb corruption in the public sector. However, while politicians and public sector officials often benefit from corruption, the main perpetrator is the private sector that bribes them. In our country, corruption at its highest level takes place because of collusion between political appointees and contractors from the business sector."

In order to reduce the current level of corruption in the country, we need to tackle it beyond the public sector. We must instill internationally accepted values such as integrity, transparency, and ethical business practices into the Afghan culture, in both the public and private sectors.

We will not win the war against terrorism and radical militants by military means alone. A responsible and accountable government - free from corruption and committed to promoting transparency and integrity across Afghan society - is the best weapon to deprive insurgents of their public support.

I believe that there is an organic relation among social, political and economic institutions in a society and therefore corruption, insecurity and economic slumps run in a parallel track. For instance, since the Taliban militants benefit from poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, eradicating drugs would be highly effective in debilitating the militants. So, a poor administration will lead to the stagnation of economic circle and fail to root out narcotic drugs. In such a case, counter-terrorism strategy will certainly meet failure. All the state machineries have to move towards their certain responsibilities coordinately so as to end the challenges. To put it succinctly, a through campaign against the political, social and economic problems is a crying need to ameliorate the status quo.

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