

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



June 30, 2016

Climate Change and Food Shortage

The climate change is not only disturbing the environment but also creating some serious problems, among which food security is an important one. The United Nations has highlighted that climate change is challenging the global drive to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030 and the world's poorest - many of whom are farmers, fishers and pastoralists - are being hit hardest by higher temperatures and an increasing frequency in weather-related disasters. At the same time, the global population is growing steadily and is expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050. To meet such a heavy demand, agriculture and food systems will need to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change and become more resilient, productive and sustainable. This is the only way that we can ensure the wellbeing of ecosystems and rural populations, and at the same time, reduce emissions.

Afghanistan is one of the countries that is seriously influenced by food shortage. The agricultural sector in Afghanistan has not been able to fulfill the requirements of the people as it has not been given proper attention by the concerned authorities. Mostly, this sector is highly dependent on the individual farmers and landowners. Most of them grow as much as they require themselves.

Therefore a large number of people, each year, have to look at the other countries for help in order to have food to eat. The international organizations in this regard have been fulfilling the food requirements of the country to a large extent, thus making the burden of the government much lighter. But this sort of help can never be permanent and it has already been facing difficulties as the donor countries that have been sponsoring such programs have decreased their contributions to a certain extent.

The shortage of food is no doubt the result of poor production on the part of the agricultural sector and the drought that has been persistently hitting the country because of low rainfall and the trouble is doubled as there has not been an active irrigation system to bring the country's water supply in use by the agricultural sector.

Food insecurity means that there is no surety that all the people are going to have food requirements. And unfortunately, the alternatives are not ready as well. The security concerns and the hardships during the cold weather make the supply of the food from other parts of the country to the regions of the starvation a Herculean task. Another alternate available for the government is to fulfill the deficiencies through government reserves and private sector imports. However, the recovery from these sources has not been up to the mark. And this year's expected food shortage would not be recovered from the mentioned sources.

The food shortage itself is a sure problem, but there are many other problems that are directly linked with the hunger that results from such shortages. Many social evils will find their way in the society and will further deteriorate the country's socio-political scenario. More people would be involved in crimes in order to feed themselves and their families. Two major problems in the country have been greatly strengthened by the continuous hunger and poverty. The first one that has been threatening the whole world is the growing terrorism in the region. The people suffering from hunger and poverty are very much likely to become part of terrorist organizations that are ready to provide them their living.

Who does not know that the suicide bombers are easily available for some hundred dollars throughout the region? The second problem that has made the country much notorious like terrorism is the production and trafficking of narcotics. Afghanistan is considered one of the leading countries in this regard. And now the phenomenon has become a part of organized crime in the country, with the involvement of national and international mafia. The poor and hungry people of the country are ready to become a part of this menace instead of suffering because of intense deprivation. They either become a part of its production or trafficking as they are paid handsomely in this regard. Further, the demand of the narcotics also makes many people think of using their lands for poppy cultivation rather than deciding to grow the crops that can yield food for the people.

It is really important for Afghanistan to stand on its own and try to fulfill most of its food demands itself. The country can be self-reliant in so many areas; all we need is to throw away the begging bowl and use our own resources appropriately and, no doubt, honestly.

Had we been doing that for the last few years, we would now be standing on our own. But unfortunately, the self-centered people among us who have just been filling their own pockets have made our people suffer to a great extent. They do not feel even for those people who do not have a single meal to eat throughout a week. Their children die of hunger and unknown diseases and their conscience saunter in the dark alleys of guilt, frustration and revenge.



The Controversy over Electoral Reform

By Hujjatullah Zia

Following the 2014 presidential election, Muhammad Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah negotiated a political agreement to form a National Unity Government (NUG). A central part in the negotiations was a commitment to electoral reform. Since then, the process of electoral reform has been slow and unsteady. After a protracted disagreement between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah on who should lead the reform portfolio and what should be its composition and authorities, the National Unity Government finally formed the Special Electoral Reform Commission (SERC) as prescribed in the political agreement to review and propose reforms to electoral structures and laws. On September 06, 2015, President Ghani issued two decrees amending respectively the Electoral Law and the Structure Law. The amendments to the two laws adopted some of SERC's recommendations. However, the Wolesi Jirga rejected both decrees on December 21 and 26, 2015. Following suit, Meshrano Jirga also voted down both decrees, on January 05, 2016. On February 28, 2016, President Ghani issued two new legislative decrees to endorse the Electoral Law and Structure Law apparently approved by the cabinet on February 10, 2016.

On June 11, 2016, the long-awaited, presidential decree on the Structure Law was put on the agenda and the Wolesi Jirga debated hotly over the issue. MPs shouted at each other and on the officials of the house, the Administrative Board, trying to stop discussion and insisting they go directly to the vote. When MPs spoke in favor of the decree, others pounded the tables, not listening and trying to prevent others from hearing the pro-decree speeches. MPs like Farhad Azimi from Balkh declared the decree unconstitutional and a ploy by the government to send such a badly drafted decree that MPs would be forced to reject it and then would be blamed by the public for standing in the way of elections. Pro-decree speakers like Fawzia Kufi from Badakhshan accused anti-decree MPs of being so useless they were trying to block elections because they knew the public would not re-elect them. Still other members, like Abdul Satar Khawasi, from Parwan province who is a member of the Legislative Commission, said no decree was needed and the government's "empty slogans of reform" should be set aside and they should get on with elections using the old commissioners.

The NUG's commitment to reforming the election system has been renewed on Monday. Addressing a cabinet meeting, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said that imperative of cleaning up the system should not be undervalued. It was a basic point of the agreement on government formation and a promise held out to the people. He is cited as having said, "We have been facing legal

hurdle to reform in the election system. Unfortunately, we are late discussing things that should have been discussed a year ago." He added that discussions on finding a legal way to implement the election reforms were underway.

On one hand, the government has started a campaign for approval of the reform decree but on the other hand, the election commissioners make efforts at rejecting the decree by the upper house. Hasibullah Kalimzai, deputy Senate chairman, said that both the government and commissioners along with administrative boards had met all senators individually. The meeting between the government and senators came to fruition and the upper house (Mesharano Jirga) approved the legislative decree on Tuesday by a majority vote.

The current Wolesi Jirga was elected on September 18, 2010 and its regular term was supposed to end on June 22, 2015. The Afghan Constitution states in Article 83 "...the work period of the House of People shall terminate, after the disclosure of the results of the elections, on the 1st of Saratan [22 June] of the fifth year and the new parliament shall commence work." This effectively means that new parliamentary elections should have taken place and the election results announced before Saratan 01, 1394 (22 June 2015). The new parliament should have started work on that date. However, elections were postponed as the NUG had promised an electoral reform. Given this has not happened.

The current parliament's mandate expired on June 22, 2015 without new representatives having been elected and without a new election date having been set at that point. In order to avoid a legal and constitutional vacuum that might have led the country even deeper into crisis, President Ashraf Ghani extended the parliament's term on June 19, 2015. It allowed MPs to continue their work until the next parliamentary elections were held - whenever that would be. The extension of the parliament's tenure was welcomed by some MPs.

Constitutionally, there is no provision that authorizes the president to extend the parliament's term. Hence, the legitimacy of the current parliament is under a serious question. Some believe that this is a violation of constitutional law.

After all, the Wolesi Jirga does not have the authority to alter election-related laws in the last year of its tenure. Article 109 states, "Proposals for amending elections law shall not be included in the work agenda of the National Assembly during the last year of the legislative term." This not only throws into question the legality of the current reform and forthcoming elections but also the legitimacy of some of the Afghanistan's key institutions.

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What The EU Must Do Now

By Anders Aslund

The United Kingdom's Brexit vote is arguably the greatest disaster ever to hit the European Union. Now, the EU must act fast - not least by ending the post-referendum market turmoil - if it is to survive.

British Prime Minister David Cameron, having lost the referendum, did the obvious thing by resigning. But the other loser is the European Commission, whose president, Jean-Claude Juncker, did little to change the outcome of the Brexit vote. Not since Jacques Delors was President of the Commission, from 1985 to 1995, has that position been filled by a leader with any vision or political clout. Juncker, like Cameron, should accept responsibility and resign. The EU needs a strong leader again. There are many worthy candidates, but I recommend former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt.

Before the post-referendum dust settles, the EU should set an ultimatum with clear and onerous principles for the UK's exit - clarity to minimize the cost, and severity to deter populists in other member states from calling for exit referenda, too. Sensibly, European Commission leaders have already moved in this direction by voiding concessions made by the EU to the UK back in February and declaring that there "will be no renegotiation."

The European Council, for its part, has already called for an immediate summit. Having failed for six years to resolve the Greek financial crisis, the EU finally appears to understand that its very survival depends on swift and decisive action. But the EU must go further than just Brexit damage control. For the last four decades, Europe's fundamental problem has been complacency in the face of low economic growth caused by excessive taxation and regulation. Europe can no longer afford this standstill. It must now begin to carry out fundamental reforms: cut unjustified social benefits; liberalize services, labor markets, and digital markets; reduce labor taxes; deregulate industry; improve education; and promote research and development.

Current EU rules are clear on the responsibilities of EU institutions and national governments, respectively. The problem is that most European governments (especially British Tory governments) tend to scapegoat the EU to mask their own political myopia. Little wonder that the EU has grown so unpopular. Given that it already receives the blame, the Euro-

pean Commission should now be granted the power to act politically. The EU has a strong case to make for itself, but it needs good-faith leaders to deliver its message to the people. European populists point to the mishandling of migration issues to justify their cause. So, for starters, the EU should establish an orderly migration policy with quotas and criteria, as Australia and Canada have successfully done, and impose proper control over its external borders. The EU border control agency, Frontex, needs a stronger mandate and more resources to fulfill this crucial role.

Going further, the EU should institute a joint foreign and defense policy to address the underlying causes of the migration crisis - namely, the conflicts in Libya and Syria. For a quarter-century, Europe has benefited from the post-Cold War peace dividend and irresponsibly allowed member states' average defense expenditure to slip to a paltry 1.4% of GDP. This should be increased to at least the 2% of GDP each NATO member has promised. Today, only five EU countries have defense expenditures at that level.

With good reason, US President Barack Obama has called Europeans "free riders." Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, going much further, openly questions both NATO and US military expenditures abroad. In the near future, Europe may no longer be able to rely on the US to defend it and should prepare for a scenario in which it is forced to fend for itself.

The principle of representative democracy is at the heart of European identity; ironically, only EU non-member Switzerland has a strong tradition of referenda. One of the positive consequences of the squalid Brexit campaign is that it demonstrated that referenda and plebiscites are demagogic, not truly democratic. EU members should recognize the risks of so-called direct democracy and tighten the criteria for the passage of referenda. At a minimum, referenda should be required to achieve a supermajority with a high percentage of voter turnout.

The best one can say about Brexit is that it finally may have put an end to European complacency. We will know for sure only if, and when, Europe chooses to save itself. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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