

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



March 02, 2016

Political and Social Awareness

Man is a social and political animal; he has to live in a society that has its social, political and economic systems. He is bound to be influenced by them and influence them. Therefore, it is necessary that he must understand the different ways through which these systems influence him and should also learn the ways through which he can affect the environment around him. Moreover, being sensible and prudent specie, he must also be careful enough to have positive effects on the society, not negative. As a member of a state and society, a person cannot be free of responsibilities and duties. If he has certain positions and status, he has roles and responsibilities as well. He cannot neglect them and turn his face away from them. He has to face them, challenge them and even strive to change them for better.

Nevertheless, it must not go unmentioned that a person from his birth does not possess enough understanding of the social roles and responsibilities. He has to be taught. There are different institutions and groups that can play a tremendous role in this regard. Among them the family, relatives, educational institution, peers, social circles, and religious institutions are the most dominant ones. Unfortunately, different groups and institutions in our society have not been able to highlight the true worth of social life and existence. Individual, therefore, lacks the basic understanding and requirements of socio-political awareness. He is taught to live his life in the way that suits his individuality. Therefore, he proves to be a self-ish being, mostly considering his personal benefits and advantages everywhere.

In fact, the attitude that is required for being a vigilant member of the society is not nourished properly within an individual in our society. In most of the cases, an individual never realizes that he can have a role for the solution of the problems that are persistent in the society. He accepts them as they are and tries to adjust among them. As a matter of fact, he hesitates to come out of his comfort zone.

This attitude needs to be changed. One of the most important steps in this regard is to have the courage to play a role within a society in a constructive manner. Solution-oriented attitude can play a tremendous role in this regard. An individual needs to make sure that he has a role, in some way or the other, in the resolution of conflicts within the community or society. Some people try to avoid conflicts and remain limited to their comfort zone; however, such an attitude would never help them be a responsible being. Apart from the resolution of the conflict, an individual must strive not to let the conflict be built and go out of control. In short, he needs to play an active role in the conflict and stop hiding himself behind others in such situation.

For being socially aware it is necessary that an individual should enhance his sensitivity towards the social justice and harmony. He should have the capacity to judge others and their actions as per the demands of justice not as per their social status, appearance or wealth. He needs to understand what the basic rights of the human beings are and must strive to take care of them. Moreover, he must analyze the social and political decisions in the society on the basis of justice, not on the basis of ethno-centric biases.

An important way of achieving socio-political awareness is to have more information about the society around. It is important for an individual to know about the social issues and evils and try to play a role, no matter how small, in their eradication.

It is definitely easier to live a lonely life and always be confined to one's comfort zone. However, it is really important for socio-politically conscious individual to come out of his comfort zone and be counted within the social life. It is also important that an individual should be the part of diversity, and must strive to intermingle with others so as to learn from them. It will also develop a sense of tolerance for others and supports in maintaining harmony.

Showing compassion and empathy can play an incredible part in getting closer to others and tightening the social bonds. Realizing the pain of others when they are hurt and understanding their position is really imperative to invigorate the social responsibility. Courtesy and responsiveness are also necessary in this regard. It is also important for an individual, who desires to develop socio-political consciousness, to be ready to listen to others and ask them for feedback regarding his attitude and behavior.

Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that the boundary between what is social and what is personal should never be violated as it is one of the basic requirements of consciousness. Being overly social may disrupt the social bonds and affiliations, and may even generate conflicts.



Need for a New Vision

By Mehdi Rezaie

Afghanistan, over the past decade, has seen the peak of efforts to improve the state of affairs in the country. The end-result of more than a decade of intense efforts is now evident for all to see - improvements in the areas of public administration, public service delivery, jobs and employment and the overall economic conditions. Parallel to this list of achievements, there are still flagrant shortcomings and monumental failures that threaten the very future of the vision of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

The efforts of the previous and current Afghan government to turn around the trend of war and conflict by negotiating a political settlement have so far ended in failure.

However, the president and the government have been unable to place a suitable substitute for the perilous insecurity and economic problems.

It would be naïve to be too excited or optimistic about the High Peace Council and what it may or may not achieve in the future. It has been devoid of any strategic vision and the very strategy that underpins it and its activities disregards many factors without which peace efforts remain futile. As the government of Afghanistan's peace efforts remain in crisis, so the country's bureaucracy and the vast administrative apparatus that is tasked with delivering on the expectations of the people and the international community.

Perhaps, the greatest failing of the state in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era has been the incapacity and the inability of the government to effectively and efficiently deal with many of the multitude of crises that have engulfed the country.

It is one thing when you have a national leadership that gradually but efficiently takes the right decisive steps to overcome these challenges.

It is quite another thing to have a leadership that is incapable and unwilling to first recognize the problems and then adopt the right policies and strategies towards the gradual resolution of these challenges.

As the years and months pass by, the country becomes more mired in crises that are the products of the state's own failures and shortcomings. It would not be realistic to place the blame for what has gone wrong in Afghanistan on foreigners.

The former president claimed that the foreigners have been the source of corruption in Afghanistan does not stand up to logic nor scrutiny. The embezzlers, fraudsters, looters, traffickers and the corrupt can continue looting, embezzling and trafficking as long as they invest the illegal proceeds inside the country was an unmitigated disaster.

Afghanistan stands at historic crossroads. What is painfully missing and its absence evidently felt is a new vision for Afghanistan, one that would be based on radical thinking, doing away with the old, tried, tested and failed paradigms and introducing and embracing new ones in conformity with the realities of today's Afghanistan. I believe that it is high time

that these desperately-needed new paradigms be introduced and adopted. Our fight against corruption is one such area where new grounds should be broken.

Zero tolerance towards corruption and graft ought to start from the highest levels in the government and the core team around the country's chief executive. A piece-meal system that focuses first and foremost on cleaning up the public service delivery organizations and agencies should be part of any reformed crusade against corruption.

Improving the public service delivery agencies is an absolute necessity that would go a long way in enhancing the government-citizen interface and relationship. The single-largest and the most frequent grievance of the people in the country is the poor quality of public services from justice delivery and rule of law to provision of basic amenities such as water and electricity.

Improving these sets of basic but core service delivery mechanisms and agencies would go a long way in improving the perceptions of the common people towards the government and governance in the country.

After all, managing the perceptions of people and shaping a favorable image of the state is a basic yet critical principle of delivering good governance. Graft, embezzling and loss to public money and the exchequer, although very important challenges, are, however, in the second order of importance given the desperate state of governance and justice delivery in the country.

The ailing and unresponsive system of justice dispensation in Afghanistan is a major hurdle in the way of consolidating the rule of law and mobilizing the support of masses in favor of the government and the state.

The justice disposal and delivery system in Afghanistan under the Judiciary as one among the three branches of the state is in separate need of extensive and sweeping reforms. The rampant graft and corruption and the slow process of judicial review that leads to accumulation of cases and makes litigation a very difficult affair need to be addressed.

The full range of issues and challenges in Afghanistan's judicial sector is beyond the scope of this article. However, the inaccessible and exclusive nature of the Judicial services in the country should be a priority for the government of Afghanistan and the international community.

The judicial system especially in the provinces and districts need to be cleansed of corruption and the full range of issues that undermine the justice dispensation process need to be integrated into a national action plan for improvement of justice delivery.

After all, after more than a decade of efforts in Afghanistan, justice dispensation is the principal duty of the government in Afghanistan especially after years of extensive and widespread human rights violations and encroachment of justice.

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Will Brexit Break the Pound?

By Harold James

The British government's recent announcement that a referendum on Britain's European Union membership will be held on June 23 was quickly followed by a sharp drop in the pound's value. Exchange rate volatility for the pound is bound to continue until the referendum, and to intensify at moments when a vote for "Brexit" looks more likely. The result may be a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which market and political instability drive British voters to reject the EU - an outcome that would be highly dangerous for them and their European counterparts alike.

The political implications recall the experience of the twentieth century, when the pound's external value was a national obsession in the UK and currency crises regularly destroyed the credibility of governments and wreaked political havoc. For example, in August 1931 - the middle of the Great Depression - a financial crisis and a run on the pound forced the resignation of the Labour government, led by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald; it was replaced by a coalition government, and the Labour Party split apart.

In 1967, another Labour government, led by Harold Wilson, was damaged by a devaluation spurred by a speculative attack; Labour lost the subsequent general election. The party regained power in 1974, but within two years Britain was hit by another currency crisis - this one large enough to require support from the International Monetary Fund. Again, Labour lost the next election and the party split. Such credibility issues were not exclusive to Labour. It was under Prime Minister John Major's Conservative government that 1992's "Black Wednesday" struck, with the pound being forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, the precursor to the euro. This severely damaged the government's credibility. Although the Conservatives did manage a narrow victory in the next election, the party's internal fissure over European integration deepened, and by the end of the 1990s, Labour was back in power (and would remain there for more than a decade).

The economic effects of Britain's twentieth-century currency crises were far less severe than the political repercussions. In fact, the devaluation of 1931 set the stage for an era of cheap money, which made 1930s Britain a much less dismal place than it had been under the economic orthodoxy of the gold standard in the 1920s. And the 1992 devaluation led to a new monetary-policy approach, greater macroeconomic stability, and faster economic growth. Today, however, the British economy is facing serious risks. Exchange-rate fluctuations pose a serious short-term challenge for monetary policy, given the potential of the resulting price changes to spur inflation. That may not seem like such a bad thing, given today's excessively low inflation (partly a result of falling oil and commodity prices); the risk, of course, is that inflation will overshoot. More dangerous is the possibility that political uncertainty in the run-up to the referendum will discourage foreigners from

buying British assets - a major problem for a country with a large current-account deficit. The prospect of losses from a declining exchange rate will be a further deterrent, potentially pushing the United Kingdom into a vicious cycle of collapsing confidence. In that case, the forced adjustment of the current account would tip the economy into recession.

As in the twentieth century, this economic breakdown is likely to destroy the credibility of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government. The question is whether that will turn voters against the government's pro-EU campaign, causing them to choose Brexit, or against the damaging referendum that the government has introduced, thereby spurring a pro-EU outcome.

Two competing narratives are now being tested. Those, including Cameron, who support continued EU membership emphasize that Europe (but not the single currency) is a source of strength and stability for the UK. Meanwhile, advocates of Brexit argue that the UK is uniquely powerful, with the most dynamic capital city in the world and, as Justice Secretary Michael Gove put it, the world's greatest concentration of "soft power."

If the prospect of a referendum alone is enough to push the UK into dire economic straits, both the government that introduced that referendum and the group campaigning to exacerbate the situation are effectively discredited. The risk is that UK voters, angry about the government's damaging actions, will succumb to the pro-Brexit camp's false claim that leaving the EU will restore the UK's economic dynamism.

In any case, the Conservative Party is sure to face the kind of internal conflict that destroyed the Labour party after 1931 and again after 1976. Already, Conservative MPs are deeply divided, with no prospect of reconciliation.

For the rest of Europe, the British political drama is a source of frustration and bitterness. At a time when the EU is confronting many serious challenges, the last thing it needed was protracted and awkward negotiations on the changes to the terms of UK membership that Cameron's government demanded.

None of this bodes well for Europe's commitment to keeping the UK in the Union. Just as some European politicians during the Greek debt crisis advocated amputating the "infected limb," a growing number may lose patience as the UK's economic situation deteriorates.

Indeed, despite the destabilizing impact of Brexit, it is possible that, in the long run, Europe would be better off without the UK. After all, Britain's government both recognizes the need for greater fiscal integration and continues to resist it. In this sense, Brexit may offer Europe the chance for a new start - one that EU leaders may consider taking. But the more likely outcome of Brexit would be the spread of financial crisis, with all of its political repercussions. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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