

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



March 10, 2018

Concerns Regarding Discrimination Against Women

Serious concerns regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan have been persistent. Unfortunately, there have not been tangible measures taken regarding discrimination and violence against women and each year, thousands of women are victimized in some way or the other.

A report on Friday, March 09, revealed that a total of 1535 cases of violence against women were recorded in northeastern Baghlan, Takhar and Kunduz province in the ongoing solar year, with 615 incidents in Takhar, 582 in Kunduz and 338 in Baghlan. Unfortunately, the response of the government against this alarming situation has not been encouraging.

It is, however, imperative to know that these are only the cases that have been recorded. There could have been many other cases that have not come to the light and have remained in the dark corridors of the houses. And, these are only the cases in three provinces of Afghanistan; the overall situation would be very frightening.

As a matter of fact, violence and discrimination against women do not seem to be decreasing in the country, and there are fears that the gains acquired in uplifting the position of women in Afghan society in the last some years, may be compromised to a certain extent. Instability and disorder have further deteriorated the situation for the weaker stratum, like women. This is coupled with discrimination and violence that basically originate from the extremist religious and tribal practices.

Women in Afghanistan, unfortunately, have seen some of the worst discriminations ever heard or experienced. Most of them were seen during the civil war and Taliban reign. After the downfall of Taliban, though there have been certain improvements, still a large portion of work needs to be done to save women from violence and discrimination and support them to live a life with dignity and honor.

The discrimination against women starts since their birth; and even before that. There have been incidents when girl babies have been killed in the wombs of their mothers. In certain cases, after the fathers come to know about the gender of the babies before their birth, they arrange for forced abortions and thus the so-called honor of the family is saved. This has, thus, given rise to a double discrimination. The first one is that the girl before taking birth has been killed because of her gender and the second is that the mother's will has never been considered regarding the birth of her child. In addition, the women who do not give birth to boys are considered as worthless and their in-laws do not respect or honor them at all.

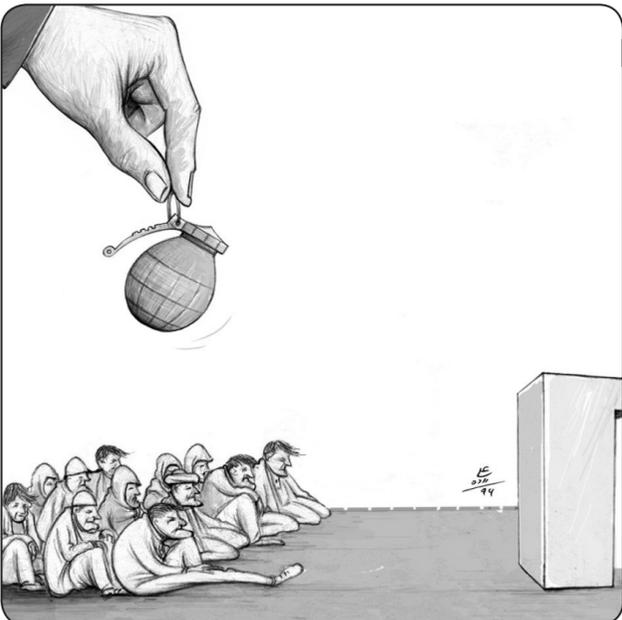
It has also led to a situation wherein the women are compelled to keep on giving birth unless the baby is a boy. This has a very negative impact on the health of women as continuous pregnancy reduces their energies and spoil their health. There are situations when women have to give birth to eight to ten children. As it deteriorates the health of the mothers, it, at the same time, engages her in the responsibilities of nourishment of so many children, as fathers are mostly considered free from such responsibilities in our society.

Continuously engaged in giving birth to too many children and nourishing them does not let women pursue any career or profession in life. Even if the women are educated, they are mostly not able to pursue their education or the profession of their choice after they are married. This deprives them from their right of pursuing the career of their choice and at the same time deprives them of financial benefits. As means of income in a family are with the men, they are financially stronger and make decisions about the family and women, as they are not able to make income by doing a job, fail to gain such advantage and are, thus, considered burden that is being shouldered by men.

As far as marriage is concerned, there are only few occasions when women are asked about their consent. Mostly, they are married in accordance to the decision of the family, or of the father, brother or uncle. They are even married to settle disputes among families and to cancel the debts of the families. They are mostly married when they are children. Child marriages are now a very common practice in Afghanistan. This gives an opportunity to the society to discriminate them as much as possible because as children they are not able to understand their basic rights and consider their situation their destiny.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, one of the worst sorts of violence against women is a sexual assault. There are different incidents when women are brutally raped by savage men to quench their covetous desires. We have witnessed incidents when women or even small girls are gang-raped in different parts of our country.

This is one of the worst types of violence that can be witnessed only in our society. A society, that claims to be Islamic, and where women are considered as the honor of the family and tribe, a little girl is gang-raped in the most brutal way. This society really requires changing its attitude and standards. It requires throwing away the mask of hypocrisy and needs to safeguard the honor and dignity of women in a really true manner.



Afghanistan can be a \$50 billion economy by 2025

By Sourajit Aiyer

Afghanistan may have seen muted economic growth in recent years; however impetus on specific drivers of growth can turn the clock around. If it wants to grow its economy from the current ~\$21 billion to \$50 billion by 2025, it would have to target a stellar 11% CAGR. That sounds daunting, but many nations have achieved decadal double-digit growth in their journey. Even India's Maharashtra state has set a target of 15% CAGR to reach \$1 trillion by 2025. A high, yet achievable, target pushes the commitment from the politicians to realize the economic agenda. But to what extent should Afghanistan focus to grow each growth-driver to realize this target? This is what we explore here.

Services-sector: ~56% of Afghanistan's GDP is estimated from services, same as its eastern neighbour. This is less than the average ~60-70% seen in most emerging markets. If Services have to make up ~65% of its GDP by 2025, it would have to grow at a 14% CAGR, higher than the estimated GDP growth. This makes it a vital driver of future growth. Afghan services are largely based on trade and transport. While these would remain priorities, deepening the services-sector through the digital economy would bring efficiencies in public-services delivery across the hinterland, bring more citizens into its organized economy and reduce the corruption of a cash-based economy. It would ensure delivery of subsidies to the intended recipients, like India's Direct Benefit Transfer. Services should include improving the reach of skill-centres, to improve employment prospects. All these would expand its addressable consumer-base.

Industry-sector: ~22% of Afghan GDP is estimated to come from industry, less than the average ~30% seen in large emerging markets. So if its industry has go up even to a ~25% proportion, it would have to grow at a 13% CAGR. This makes it the most vital driver for future growth. Afghanistan's gross investment at ~18% of GDP has lagged the ~35-40% seen in China, Malaysia and Thailand in their initial years of industrialization. If it intends to push this towards ~35% to drive capacity-addition, its investment has to grow at a sheer 21% CAGR to make up for the historical lag. It makes it inevitable to partner with countries that can fund this journey. Investment also correlates with productive imports like machinery. In Afghanistan, import comprised a high ~46% of GDP, more than double the share of investment in the economy. Industrializing nations saw their share of imports to be ~60% of their share of investment. This implies a portion of Afghan imports are not for productive purposes like investment, and these should reduce overtime. So import should grow at a 1% CAGR to hold its share

at ~21 by 2025 (i.e. 60% of the share of investment, estimated at 35% of GDP). That would imply most imports are only for productive use contributing towards investment. So where should investments go? The country needs economic corridors, infrastructure both hard and soft, affordable housing for the middle-class and industry clusters in the underdeveloped regions for inclusive growth. But this also means addressing the Ease of Doing Business parameters, where it lost its rank by 19 places since 2014.

Agriculture-sector: ~22% of Afghanistan's GDP, in line with the South Asian LDCs and higher than the sub-10% share in most large emerging markets. The crux here is to improve farm-productivity, as agriculture employs more than 60% of its workforce. If it has to reduce agriculture's share to even 15% by 2025, it would grow at a 6% CAGR. But this has to be backed by productivity improvement. This also includes re-skilling unproductive labour for high-growth sectors like construction through skill-training centres like India's NSDC. It means investing in irrigation and market linkages to maximise yield and ensure the farmer gets correct prices. Agro-produce can also contribute significantly to its export.

Export-sector: Only ~7% of Afghan GDP is estimated to come from exports, far less than any peer. Its export has to grow at a monumental 28% CAGR till 2025, if it has to meet the forex demand for import and make trade imbalance nil. It has an advantage, because the AFN dropped by ~4% against the USD last year. At the same time, further Free Trade Agreements and export-schemes should open more opportunities. It should also push services-sector export and not rely only on merchandise export, since that would marry its need to push services-sector too.

Consumption-sector: Afghanistan has a high share of private consumption at ~120% vs. ~60% in large emerging markets. Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Nepal all have a similar per-capita, but they spend less relatively. Dependence solely on external borrowing is not healthy for the forex and collateral position, especially when imports would continue. It needs to push up its savings rate from ~23% to 30%+ by energizing its domestic financial sector with more products, assets, talent and regulations. That would incentivize more saving and postponing consumption.

All in all, these segmental growth-estimates to target a GDP of \$50 billion by 2025 may sound over-ambitious. But it may not be unachievable, if specific drivers like industry, investment, services-export and farm-productivity are given the extent of push as derived here.

Sourajit Aiyer is an author, financial services professional, and researcher for South Asia Fast Track. He Can Be Reached At sourajitaiyer@gmail.com

Xinhua Insight: President Xi's five years (Part 2)

By Xinhua writers

SHARING OPPORTUNITIES

Two action films recently rose to stardom of China's film industry. The plots of "Wolf Warrior 2" and "Operation Red Sea" were similar: Chinese soldiers fighting hard in fictional war-torn Africa or the Middle East to rescue Chinese citizens and their down-trodden local friends. However, the plots were not pure fiction. In 2015, as war flared in Yemen, the People's Liberation Army Navy was ordered to repatriate Chinese citizens there. More than 600 Chinese nationals and 200 foreigners were evacuated just in days. "Wolf Warrior 2" was the country's highest-grossing film ever. It ended with a picture of the Chinese passport with a line: "To Chinese nationals, when you run into danger overseas, don't give up! Behind you, there is a strong motherland!" Across cinemas, audiences went wild, giving standing ovations, singing the national anthem, and many were even brought to tears. Such was the power of the film. Indeed, traveling with a Chinese passport is easier than ever before. More than 65 countries and regions have scrapped pre-travel visa requirements for Chinese passport holders. Chinese travelers made more than 100 million overseas trips every year in recent years. Companies were eager to do business abroad as well. Last year, Chinese invested 120 billion U.S. dollars in 6,236 enterprises in 174 countries and regions, providing jobs and stable salaries to locals. It is the fifth year since Xi proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to benefit the world through trade and infrastructure cooperation. In 2017, trade between China and Belt and Road countries reached 7.4 trillion yuan. More than 80 countries and organizations have signed deals with China under the initiative. In early 2016, the world's first China-initiated multilateral financial institute -- the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank -- started operating. Its membership has since expanded to 84. A stronger China also has much to offer within its boundaries. The country's foreign direct investment hit all-time high in 2017, reaching 878 billion yuan. More investment went to the tech sector both in services and manufacturing. Trading hubs across the country -- from Yiwu to Guangzhou -- have seen more foreign businessmen than ever before. Some, with foreign nationals from over 100 countries, are being turned into an international marketplace. In the trading port of Shishi, southeastern Fujian Province, Yemeni businessman Marwan Aqlan Saeed runs a trading firm that sells Made-in-China garments, toys and suitcases to the Middle East. He has been living in China for many years and still cannot stop admiring the country's progress. "Five years may just be enough for us to build a road back home. In China, they can build an entire city from scratch. The speed is breathtaking," said Saeed, who now calls Shishi home. He said he would like to expand into Africa, riding on the opportunities from the Belt and Road Initiative. "The opportunities are not restricted to Chinese firms. We all benefit." Xi's idea of building a community of shared future for humanity has won worldwide recognition and plaudits. It was included in United Nations resolutions and inspired the theme of the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos. Beijing is seen playing a constructive role in thorny regional issues from the Middle East to the Korean Peninsula. A general goal of China's diplomacy is to foster a new type of international relations and to build a community with a shared future for humanity. The goal can trace its roots in the ancient Chinese philosophy of "a just cause should be pursued for common good," in the core values of a foreign policy of peace which China has been following for more than six decades, and in Xi's pursuit of common well-being for the Chinese and people around the world.

Donald Trump, president of the United States, was the first foreign head-of-state to visit China after the 19th CPC National Congress. During their Beijing meeting, Xi said he and Trump had in-depth exchanges of views on bilateral ties and issues of common concern and reached broad consensus. The visit took place just a few months after their Mar-a-Lago meet in the United States. The meet, which lasted seven hours in two days, set the tone for developing the bilateral ties. Xi's interactions with Russian President Vladimir Putin have been frequent since the 18th CPC National Congress. The Sino-Russian relations have become a cornerstone for world peace. Xi told Putin during their meet in Da Nang, Vietnam that China and Russia set a model for a new type of international relations based on mutual respect, fairness and justice, win-win cooperation. Over the past five years, China hosted a series of global summits including the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, the G20 2016 Summit in Hangzhou, and the BRICS Summit in Xiamen. Under Xi, people have seen a further rise in China's international influence, ability to inspire, and power to shape; and China has made great new contributions to global peace and development. Zheng, the Fudan professor, said China achieved fundamental and across-the-board progress under Xi's leadership in economic and social development, rule of law, state governance, Party building, cultural revitalization and environmental protection. The philosophy underpinning the profound changes in China over the past five years was crystallized as Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Zheng said that China as a socialist country had overcome many modernization challenges facing the developing world and overtaken Western developed countries in many fields, showing the strength of the socialist system. "Xi has led China into a new era and a Chinese model to advance human civilization is in the making," he said. "As China moves closer to the center stage of the world, this model will make a bigger contribution to humanity."

LOOKING TO FUTURE

In a workshop attended by senior officials in January, Xi used a metaphor to describe the work for them. "To meet the test of our time, we are like exam takers and the people will judge our performance," he said. The test is yet to finish. Xi laid out a two-step approach to future development: from 2020 to 2035, working to basically realize socialist modernization; from 2035 to the middle of the century, developing China into a great modern socialist country. There are, of course, challenges ahead. China's per capita GDP has exceeded 8,000 U.S. dollars but lags far behind that of the United States, which is 57,000 U.S. dollars. Chinese industrial structure remains outdated, ability to innovate is not strong enough. Risks in the financial system have not been eliminated. Xi defined the "principal contradiction" facing Chinese society as one between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. In his New Year speech this year, Xi said "I am aware of the people's biggest concerns, such as education, employment, income, social security, healthcare, old-age security, housing and the environment." He said the efforts at improving people's well-being had not always been satisfactory and the success of yesterday was no guarantee of success forever. Xi kept reminding fellow Party and government cadres that the new era belongs to those who work hard and urged them to open a new chapter in the history of the Chinese people's great struggle.

Actions to follow Xi's orders will be unveiled at the NPC session. Under Xi's leadership, China will go from strength to strength.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.