

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



March 19, 2017

The Shaky Pillars of Democracy

Democracy plays a crucial role in upholding the rights and freedoms of a nation. In democratic states, all individuals are born with natural rights which should be respected without considering one's race or religion. Since democracy is defined as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people", people's role is prominent in political aspects and they send their representatives to parliament, through election, to protect their natural rights, raise their voice against injustice and raise their red cards if a law is not in favor of the public.

Parliament is said to be the "beating heart" of democracy. No wonder, parliament or legislative power approves the law which has to be in accordance with a country's beliefs, cultural values and social norms. With the establishment of parliament, the power of the state will be decentralized and the nation will not suffer from the destructive role of monopoly or absolute power. Moreover, the parliament is not supposed to necessarily approve the law but also supervise the state. So, parliament restricts the state's power and represents a nation.

It is believed that democracy is impossible without a constitution. Constitution is the mother of all law and the full-length mirror of a nation which reflects its religious tenets, cultural values and social mores. However, there are also some symbolic constitutions which are approved under the close supervision and in accordance with the satisfaction of rulers. For example, Afghanistan's former rulers gathered people in Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) to endorse constitution but it granted big authority for rulers. The point is that all constitutions do not reflect democracy but a democratic state must have a constitution based on a country's necessities.

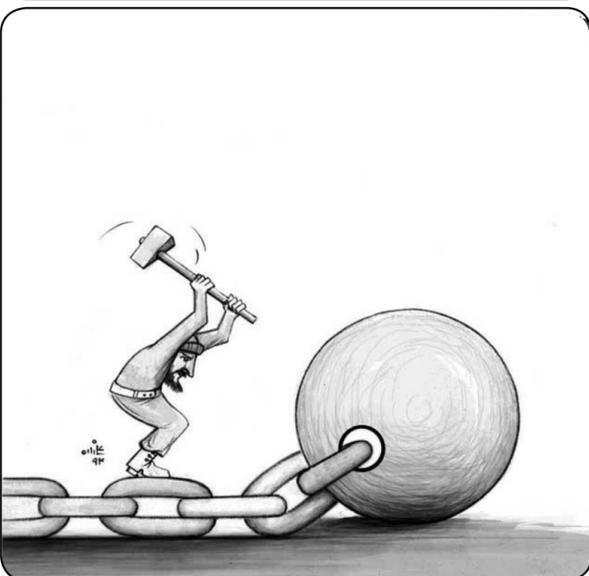
The post-Taliban Afghanistan is also democratic with parliament and constitutions. The Constitution of Afghanistan, in which the rights and freedoms of the nation is valued, is approved immaculately. Based on this constitution, the state is supposed to uphold the rights and dignity of men and women and no one is to be discriminated on the grounds of their ethnic, social or religious backgrounds. The government has also vowed to form a civil society void of oppression, atrocity, discrimination as well as violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights, and attaining peoples' freedoms and fundamental rights. Article 24 states, "Liberty is the natural right of human beings. This right has no limits unless affecting others freedoms as well as the public interest, which shall be regulated by law. Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity."

Moreover, violence has no room in the Constitution as it is said, "Persecution of human beings shall be forbidden." Men's natural and inviolable rights are recognized in this law and the government is to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and United Nation's Charter. Despite having democratic constitution and parliament, the rights and liberty of the nation are violated to a great extent. The beating heart of democracy does not work out properly and effectively as it is supposed to do. The legal period of parliament is over without conducting parliamentary election.

The constitution is not implemented and a large number of people's rights are trampled upon with impunity, especially when the violators are from the authoritative groups. In some cases, Members of Parliament cannot represent the will of the nation. In other words, the legislative, executive and judiciary powers are not moving organically.

Constitutionally, "The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity". Nevertheless, people's liberty is curtailed in one way or another. For instance, terrorism is a serious threat to the nation's freedoms. After all, women's liberty is restricted not only in social life but also within the four walls, mainly in the tribal belts. In a nutshell, violence persists in one's social and individual life which is a strong barrier before freedom.

It is believed that whenever one's fundamental rights, i.e. the rights to life, liberty and property, are disregarded in a society and people are discriminated or killed on the basis of their case, color and creed, there will be no room for democracy. The so-called democracy in Afghanistan is really vulnerable. In other words, there are many barriers which slow down the growth of democracy in Afghanistan. On the one hand, the escalated militancy and terrorism and on the other hand, corruptions or negligence in government's apparatus hamper democracy and people are not able to exercise their rights freely. Forming a civil society, where the public rights are protected, is not possible without upholding the bases of democracy in the country. The three aforementioned powers should work organically and the parliamentary election must be held soon transparently. No one is supposed to be beyond law. The law-breakers, be it officials or common people, must stand on trial. The constitution will have to be enforced without considering one's position or power - this is highly instrumental in supporting democracy. It is hoped that the government will pave the way for democracy through protecting the nation's rights and liberty and adopting effective strategy in combating terrorism. Now considering the shaky pillars of democracy in the country, can one call Afghanistan a democratic society?



Today's Society; Basic Requirements are Missing

By Dilawar Sherzai

The societies and states that have been formed in today's world, though have evolved with the passage of time, still possess dominant shortcomings. These shortcomings if not met on time, the discrepancies and discontentment would keep on rising and disturbing the human beings, societies and the governments. If we analyze today's societies, we come to know that there are some very basic requirements that are missing. Among those requirements, justice, equality and rights are the most essential ones. And it is important to note that these elements are interdependent.

Though there have been many endeavors in human society to acquire justice equality and liberty, the French Revolution of 1789 was largely a protest against the prevailing inequalities and the Revolutionaries adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) asserting, "Men are born and always continue to be free and equal in respect of their rights."

But, it was only in the present century that effort was made to eliminate inequalities in the economic and social sphere and necessary laws were enacted to protect the interests of the workers. It was emphasized that equality in the economic sphere was more important than equality in the civil and political spheres. It was asserted that political liberty without economic equality was a myth. The decline of imperialism and colonialism and the emergence of a large number of independent states in Asia, Africa and Latin America gave a further impetus to the principle of equality.

All the states began to be treated as equals at the international levels irrespective of their size, resources and importance. The war against racial discrimination and the introduction of universal franchise further strengthened the doctrine of equality. Most of the modern states devoted great attention to the improvement of economic lot of the deprived ones to bring about economic equality. Yet, there are serious matters to be resolved in this regard. Laski has said, "Political equality is never real unless it is accompanied by virtual economic equality; political power, otherwise, is bound to be handmade of economic power." Definitely, in the absence of economic equality it is difficult to imagine a just political system.

It is important to remember that economic equality does not imply that there should be equal distribution of wealth, because this sort of equality is incapable of realization.

On the other hand it means that there should not be concentration of wealth in few hands only and certain minimum standards of income should be assured to all before anyone can be allowed to have more.

In other words, the basic needs of all should be met before some people are permitted to lead a luxurious life. Prof. Laski expresses this point, "I have no right to take cakes when my neighbor is compelled to go without bread." Unfortunately, these concepts are being neglected in today's world.

A very intimate relationship exists between political liberty and economic equality. It has been asserted that there cannot be any political liberty without economic equality. This assertion contains a great amount of truth because the political liberties like

right to vote, right to contest election, right to hold public office etc. cannot be genuine unless there is economic equality in the state. As the successful working of the present democratic system depends on the active and effective participation of the people, it is indeed difficult to envisage that such participation can be possible in a society suffering from economic inequalities. Further, as the public opinion is greatly molded by media like press, radio, films etc. the capitalist classes who own these media are able to use them for furthering their own interests. As a result the poor people are not able to make an honest use of their political liberty.

Hence, political freedom becomes meaningless in the absence of economic equality. Laski says that 'either the state must dominate the property or the property will dominate the state. For proper liberty it is essential that there should be democratic setup both in the administration of justice and industry. Political liberty in reality can only be real when there is social and economic liberty'.

It is widely accepted phenomenon that only when the people have reasonable economic opportunities, like employment, reasonable wages, adequate leisure, etc. they can develop themselves properly in a society where some people starve while the others have things in abundance, the weaker sections are inevitably denied these opportunities and hence cannot make a genuine use of their political liberty. For an effective use of political liberty it is desirable that the economic inequalities should be removed.

Even other kinds of liberties, like civil liberty are meaningless without economic equality. The intimate relationship between economic equality and liberty has been brought out by Prof. Cole: "It is not possible for men to be socially or politically equal as long as there exist among them differences of wealth and income so great as to divide them into distinct economic classes with widely differing opportunities in childhood to become healthy, educated, travelled and used to regard the world as a place made to suit their convenience.

The slum child is not as healthy as the child whose parents can afford to give it the privileges of good food and sunlight. In school, the children of the poorest classes lag behind those who come from better equipped homes.

Secondly, education is still a privilege for a minority selected mainly on economic grounds. And there is a difference, for the most part, between the few who are taught from childhood the arts of command and the many whose lessons are intended to inculcate rather the duties of obedience and respect for their betters." In conclusion, the words of Hebert A. Deare can be quoted: "Liberty and equality are neither in conflict nor even separate but are different facets of the same ideal ... indeed since they are identical, there can be no problem of law or to what extent they are or can be related, this is surely the nearest, if not the most satisfactory solution even devised for a perennial problem in political philosophy".

In fact, as Tawny has put it, "A large measure of equality, so far from being inimical to liberty, is essential to it".

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Out of Time in North Korea

By Richard N. Haass

There is a growing consensus that the first genuine crisis of Donald Trump's presidency could involve North Korea and, more specifically, its ability to place a nuclear warhead on one or more ballistic missiles possessing sufficient range and accuracy to reach the continental United States. A crisis could stem from other factors as well: a large increase in the number of nuclear warheads that North Korea produces, evidence that it is selling nuclear materials to terrorist groups, or some use of its conventional military forces against South Korea or US forces stationed there.

There is no time to lose: any of these developments could occur in a matter of months or at most years. Strategic patience, the approach toward North Korea that has characterized successive US administrations since the early 1990s, has run its course.

One option would be simply to accept as inevitable continued increases in the quantity and quality of North Korea's nuclear and missile inventories. The US, South Korea, and Japan would fall back on a combination of missile defense and deterrence.

The problem is that missile defense is imperfect, and deterrence is uncertain. The only certainty is that the failure of either would result in unimaginable costs. In these circumstances, Japan and South Korea might reconsider whether they, too, require nuclear weapons, raising the risk of a new and potentially destabilizing arms race in the region.

A second set of options would employ military force, either against a gathering North Korean threat or one judged to be imminent. One problem with this approach is uncertainty as to whether military strikes could destroy all of the North's missiles and warheads.

But even if they could, North Korea would probably retaliate with conventional military forces against South Korea. Given that Seoul and US troops stationed in South Korea are well within range of thousands of artillery pieces, the toll in lives and physical damage would be immense. The new South Korean government (which will take office in two months) is sure to resist any action that could trigger such a scenario.

Some therefore opt for regime change, hoping that a different North Korean leadership might prove to be more reasonable. It probably would; but, given how closed North Korea is, bringing about such an outcome remains more wish than serious policy.

This brings us to diplomacy. The US could offer (following close consultations with the governments in South Korea and Japan, and ideally against the backdrop of additional United Nations resolutions and economic sanctions) direct negotiations with North Korea. Once talks commenced, the US side could advance a deal: North Korea would have to agree to

freeze its nuclear and missile capabilities, which would require cessation of all testing of both warheads and missiles, along with access to international inspectors to verify compliance. The North would also have to commit not to sell any nuclear materials to any other country or organization.

In exchange, the US and its partners would offer, besides direct talks, the easing of sanctions.

The US and others could also agree to sign - more than 60 years after the end of the Korean War - a peace agreement with the North. North Korea (in some ways like Iran) could keep its nuclear option but be barred from translating it into a reality. Concerns over North Korea's many human-rights violations would not be pressed at this time, although the country's leaders would understand that there could be no normalization of relations (or end of sanctions) so long as repression remained the norm.

Full normalization of ties would also require North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons program.

At the same time, the US should limit how far it is willing to go. There can be no end to regular US-South Korean military exercises, which are a necessary component of deterrence and potential defense, given the military threat posed by the North. For the same reason, any limits on US forces in the country or region would be unacceptable. And any negotiation must take place within a fixed time period, lest North Korea use that time to create new military facts.

Could such an approach succeed? The short answer is "maybe." China's stance would likely prove critical. Chinese leaders have no love for Kim Jong-un's regime or its nuclear weapons, but it dislikes even more the prospect of North Korea's collapse and the unification of the Korean Peninsula with Seoul as the capital.

The question is whether China (the conduit by which goods enter and leave North Korea) could be persuaded to use its considerable influence with its neighbor. The US should offer some reassurances that it would not exploit Korea's reunification for strategic advantage, while warning China of the dangers North Korea's current path poses to its own interests. Continued conversations with China about how best to respond to possible scenarios on the peninsula clearly make sense.

Again, there is no guarantee that diplomacy would succeed. But it might. And even if it failed, demonstrating that a good-faith effort had been made would make it less difficult to contemplate, carry out, and subsequently explain to domestic and international audiences why an alternative policy, one that included the use of military force, was embraced. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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