

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



March 29, 2016

The Ill-Maintained Roads

There are various types of developments that are believed to be essential for the people of a country in the modern world. And within a country, the government bears the responsibility to make these developments attainable. In the modern and developed countries, where the governments are very capable and agile, the developments are very frequent and take place as per the needs of the people, whereas in the underdeveloped and developing countries such developments are scanty.

One of the developments that are believed to be very much important for modern way of living is the construction and maintenance of roads. Through roads it is possible to link different parts of the country and, at the same time, different parts of a village or city. This connection makes every part of the country easily accessible and resultantly supports the people in making their lives easier. Without proper networks of roads it is impossible to think of efficient and effective transportation. The networks of roads basically provide an infrastructure for different other types of developments that are necessary for a country. Business is one of the factors that are highly dependent on well-maintained roads. The production companies have to transfer their products to different parts of the country and city, which is impossible without roads. The timely transfer of their products does not only bring them money but also assists the customers in fulfilling their needs on time. It is not always possible for all the businesses to transfer their products from one place to another through airplane, therefore the roads provide them an easier and cheaper means of transportation. Moreover, the businessmen and other official personnel have to travel to different countries and even different parts of the country usually; therefore, they would need the support of an effective transportation system equipped with healthy roads.

The roads are also very much useful in providing the people and making them avail the humanitarian services as well. It is very difficult to provide different types of services to the people who live in the remote areas of the country. They, because of no access to development works, are always far away from medical services, proper education, clean drinking water, electricity and even proper food to eat. As there are no roads that lead to them, they always suffer from dearth of basic requirements and government is not able to reach them and even know about them.

The roads are also very much necessary for bringing about beauty to a place and support people to have safe recreational journeys. It is really weird and unpleasant to find the roads that are broken and dusty. Moreover, the ugliness further increases in such roads when there is rain or overflow of drain water. Such conditions can cause different types of diseases as the drain water may remain on the roads for days and invite mosquitoes and other insects. In addition, the drain water, containing different types of bacteria, dries on the road and afterwards is blown in the air by passing vehicles and wind and becomes the stuff the people breathe, which can cause different types of lung diseases.

Afghanistan is one of the countries that are suffering from the lack of proper network of roads. There are many areas in the country that are not accessible through proper roads and people remain away from attention and proper services. Leave the other parts of the country aside, the condition of roads in the capital Kabul are pathetic as well. Anyone, who might have experienced travelling through different parts of the capital city, can witness the agony they face in such an experience. There are only few roads that are well-maintained while the rest are nothing but ancient remains that support dust more than vehicles and people.

The recent rainfall in the country has unveiled the true conditions of the roads and the roads in capital have now become ponds of water, where people would require boats to pass from side of the road to the other. The vehicles are not able to pass through them and every day many of them can be found caught in the water and the drivers can be seen making efforts to come out of it.

No proper drainage system has proved to be lethal and there is no one to pay attention to the situation. The residents of the city cry for help and have tried to bring the situation in the notice of higher authorities but there has not been much heed. Recently, President Ashraf Ghani seems to have taken notice of the situation and directed the Municipality to be more active and make utmost efforts to deal with the situation; however, it is yet to be seen whether there will be real follow up. Afghanistan does not have latest technology that can support in maintaining their roads. Attention and consideration in this regard is of great importance. Afghan government, donor agencies and developed countries that are willing to support Afghanistan can divert attention to this important issue. Such supports are very much crucial for Afghanistan and can assist them in developing strong infrastructure. Afghanistan is in crying need of latest technology in almost all fields of life and in case of maintenance of roads the requirement becomes even more essential as the situation is not satisfactory in this regard.



The Lingering Immigration Crisis of Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Thousands of Afghan refugees are stranded at Greece-Macedonia border while thousands more are awaiting forced deportation to Turkey after a recently-agreed deal between the EU and the Turkish government came into force. The EU and Turkey rushed to signing the deal after Austria and other Balkan countries imposed restrictions on their borders and later halted entry of refugees crossing to reach the western European countries. While many are still believed to be on the way to Europe coasts, European countries including Germany, which hosts most of Afghans who have come to Europe in last two years, are signaling tougher stances for sending back thousands of refugees back to their countries of origin. Despite the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, Afghans are one of the main groups of newly-arrived migrants who are under pressures to return back, and the European governments say a large portion of Afghan refugees have no chances of staying in Europe.

This is while internal factors for flow of people particularly young Afghans out of the country remain in place. Perhaps the biggest for all those leaving the country is the uncertainty hovering over the future of the country with the war and violence raging and the economy in decline. Amidst the unfolding global migrant crisis and the continued flow of Afghans out of the country, the Afghan government seems to be starting considering some concrete plans for stemming the flow and dealing with return of thousands of Afghan refugees that would be deported from European countries. Officials at the Ministry of Information and Culture say the ministry plans to work with other government ministries to help the returnees and provide them employment, education and health opportunities to reintegrate in the country. The move by the government to consider plans for assisting the returnees to reintegrate to the society and start a life anew in Afghanistan is promising for easing the Afghan immigration crisis. However, it will need much more and broader measures. The Afghan government will need to devise a long-term and broad national plan involving not only government agencies but also public entities and the private sector. The crisis of refugees will linger for many years and maybe for many decades. The ongoing refugee crisis is only a tip of the iceberg in a difficult juncture of Afghanistan's history, and is not going to be resolved through short-term programs. The current trend of immigration is not simply flow people out of the country. It is going to become further complicated that would have many socio-economic aspects. The immigration crisis would in the upcoming years – and maybe decades – involve return of refugees and its inevitable challenges, the illegal human smuggling, outflow of workforce and brain drains, functionality and capability of government's diplomacy, and suffering of Afghans on the ways reaching neighboring countries as well as other affluent countries of the world. Afghan officials predict an inflow of the Afghan refugees who escaped to Europe in recent years. Speaking at a meeting of the Upper House of the parliament, the Minister of Refugees

and Repatriation predicted that about 40 percent of Afghan refugees – who are about 100,000 in number – who have reached Europe as part of the recent influx would not receive asylum and the European countries would send thousands of Afghan back.

The possible return refugees from the neighboring and Western countries would have immense consequences back at home. The Afghan government, on one hand, needs to be prepared for a long-term approach to the repatriation of Afghan refugees, and on the other hand, will need to create 'keep factors' to persuade Afghans to stay and not to leave the country in search of unforeseen luck. Despite that the recent initiative announced by the ministry of Information and Culture is a good start for dealing with the immigration challenge; however, it is far from being proportionate to the challenge. The returnees would feel desperate and helpless and need special care. The government needs to feel the pains and suffering of the refugees on their way to other countries and those who are denied asylum and sent back to Afghanistan. The authorities angered many in the Afghan refugee community in European countries after suggesting that Afghanistan was able to accept repatriated Afghan refugees. However, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation maintained the stance that it is seeking agreements that include only voluntarily return of refugees. On Sunday, Sayed Hossain Alemi Balkhi also stressed that the Afghan government has opposed forced deportation of Afghan refugees and is negotiating with the Europeans countries to arrange voluntarily return of Afghan refugees whose asylum request are denied. The government needs to remain careful of any plan that involve forced deportation of Afghan refugees return.

The government needs to take immediate actions to help those stranded in Turkey, Greece and Balkan countries. It is a matter of functionality and capability of Afghan ministries of refugees and foreign affairs to take initiatives to help those refugees stuck in dire situations in Greek islands or elsewhere in Indonesia, Turkey and the neighboring countries. In the Thursday's parliamentary session, the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs demanded a private behind-doors meeting with MPs to explain the situation involved the Afghan refugees in Greece and the measures of the government. The authorities perhaps fear public backlash over what is going on between the Afghan government and the EU states. However, the public have the right to know over the developments and the measures of the government.

There is immediate need for stemming the flow of people out of the country by all possible means. In the session with the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, many MPs were angry over open activity of the smugglers who encourage people to leave the country for Europe. There is a decisive plan needed for tackling the lucrative people-smuggling business. Though the problem of people leaving for Europe may start easing with the recent EU-Turkey deal, the government needs to be prepared for dealing with a long-term and protracted immigration problem in Afghanistan.

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The State of the United States

By Richard N. Haass

The US presidential election is still more than half a year away, and it is impossible to know with any certainty who will be nominated to represent the major parties, much less who will be the 45th occupant of the White House. But it is not too soon to assess the mood of the country's more than 320 million inhabitants and what it will mean for the man or woman who ultimately prevails in what must seem to most people around the world to be an endless political soap opera. The dominant mood in the United States today is one of considerable anxiety, if not outright anger. The Washington Post recently published a four-part series of articles revealing popular fury aimed at Wall Street, Muslims, trade deals, Washington, police shootings, President Barack Obama, Republicans, immigrants, and other targets.

One of the worst descriptions to be applied to a person nowadays is "professional politician." The beneficiaries of this state of mind are anti-establishment candidates who espouse policies in opposition to free trade and immigration reform and who call for a radical overhaul of current tax and spending policies. The details of what they advocate may well differ, but their platforms share a promise of radical departure from the status quo. The basis of this mood is hardly self-evident, as the country is better off economically than it was a half-dozen years ago, in the immediate aftermath of the 2007-2008 economic crisis. Over nine million jobs have been created since then, interest rates are low (making loans for homes and cars more affordable), and the fall in the price of gasoline is the equivalent of a \$700 tax cut for the average American family. Moreover, the stock market has risen some 200% since its low of seven years ago, and millions of people who were without health insurance are now covered. Yet this good economic news is offset in many cases by weak growth in household incomes, which have stagnated in real (inflation-adjusted) terms for some 15 years. The percentage of Americans working full time has still not reached the level it was at seven years ago. And many fear that their jobs will disappear because of foreign competition, new technologies, or outsourcing. A large number of Americans are living longer, but are anxious, as they have failed to set aside the funds needed to ensure that their retirement will allow them to live comfortably into old age. Some are paying health-insurance premiums that they previously had avoided because of mandates in the reform enacted under Obama.

There is also the issue of inequality. This causes real anger, but the problem is not so much inequality (which, though worse, is

nothing inherently new) as it is the decline in opportunity. The American Dream is giving way to class consciousness – a profound change for a country founded on the ideal that anyone can improve his or her lot through hard work.

But the reasons for anxiety and anger transcend economic realities and worries. There is also physical insecurity, whether because of crime or the fear of terrorism. In many communities, there is concern, too, about where the culture and the society are heading.

Modern media tend to make things worse. Ours is an age of "narrowcasting," not broadcasting. People increasingly tune in to cable channels or websites that reinforce their views and ideologies.

Little of this is reassuring. The national mood transcends the election campaign and will pose a real challenge to the new president and Congress. The divisions within and between the Democratic and Republican parties will make compromise and the formation of coalitions that are essential for governing all but impossible.

Concerns over retirement and health-care affordability will make it that much more difficult to reform entitlements, even though their expansion will drive up the national debt to record levels. Free trade is blamed for job losses and is losing support, even though it has also been a source of new jobs and greater consumer choice – and has strengthened America's strategic position around the world. Immigration, long part of the country's heritage and a source of valuable talent, is now the object of so much controversy that prospects for reform are dim.

The mood of the US may also intensify officials' domestic focus. Already turned off by foreign involvement in the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions, which cost much more than they achieved, many Americans are skeptical of what the US can accomplish abroad. They are frustrated with allies seen as not carrying their fair share of common burdens, and they are increasingly convinced that the government needs to focus less on the world and more on fixing what is wrong with the US.

Some in other countries will no doubt read all of this with satisfaction; but, overall, it is bad news for much of the world. An America that is distracted and divided is less likely to be willing and able to take the lead in promoting stability in the Middle East, Europe, or Asia, or in meeting global challenges. And, without US leadership, these challenges are likely to go unmet, turning into problems or, worse, crises.

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