

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



March 30, 2017

China Stands Strong for Regional Trade

China as a regional power seems to be very active regarding business opportunities not only for its own self but for the region as a whole. One of the most important initiatives in this regard is 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative that is being pursued by China to open trade routes in the whole region and even to the other continents. OBOR basically refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is gaining support and acceptance in the Eurasian and Southeast Asian nations and is believed to be a vital route for growing businesses in the region.

As Afghanistan is a channel connecting Central Asia and South Asia, it has a vital role in the project, therefore, it can benefit to a large extent from it. If the idea of One Belt One Road is successfully implemented, it would open up the old economic routes in Asia. Afghanistan as an ancient economic artery of the Silk Road, can put interconnection and relationships of trade and investment through the region as its top priority.

China is already working for the implementation of big economic and infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. Preparations are taking place in this regard and even both the countries are in the process of signing different Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) as well. Moreover, China is also investing billions of Dollars in Pakistan for developing China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that will extend to other regional countries in the future and Afghanistan is one of them.

Moreover, the importance of Afghanistan for the development of Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and its different corridors cannot be overlooked. Thus, Afghanistan is an important country for the development of OBOR and different projects that lead to it and China seems to realize this fact.

Sino-Afghan relations are at a historical point as China could be in the leading role in the post withdrawal Afghanistan. It can definitely play a constructive role in the peace process in Afghanistan and China has already given the indication that it is ready to support Afghanistan in this regard. Different strategists in Afghanistan also believe that China could be really supportive for Afghanistan in the upcoming challenges. They, on many occasions, have expressed hope that Beijing could play proactive role in Afghan peace process, and also emphasized that lasting peace in Afghanistan would benefit Afghanistan, China and the whole region.

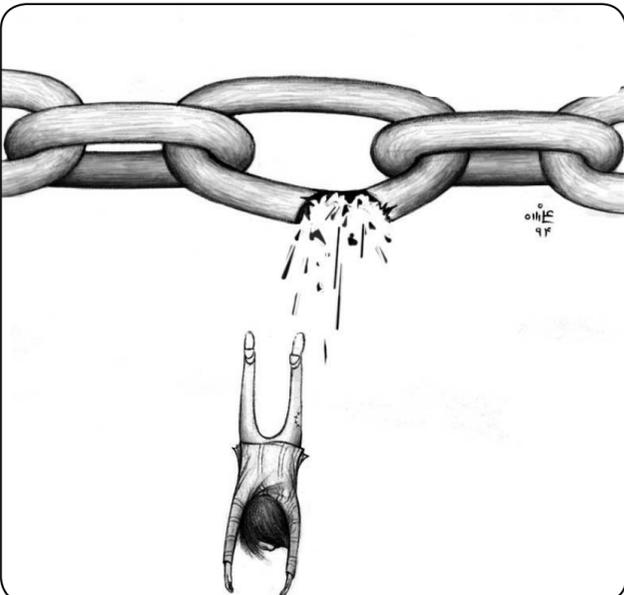
On the other hand, China can also have an immense role to play in the economic stability of Afghanistan and promoting the business and financial self-sufficiency of the country.

It has already done much in the same regard. China is not the largest donor country to Afghanistan, but China's aid is sincere and without any political conditions. In the 1950s and 1960s, although China was not better off at that time, it still built some aid projects such as Parwan Irrigation System and Kandahar Hospital for Afghanistan, which still function well in promoting the livelihood and welfare of local people. In recent years, China has been actively supporting the Afghan peaceful reconstruction. China had provided more than 1.6 billion yuan of grants, trained more than one thousand professionals in all fields through bilateral and multilateral channels, provided over 10 batches of goods and materials, built important projects such as Jumhoriye Hospital, Teaching Building of Chinese Language Department and Guest House of Kabul University, National Center of Science and Technology Education, and Multi-functional Center in the Presidential Palace for Afghanistan.

All of these have played effective role in promoting the development and people's livelihood of Afghanistan, and gained praises from all walks of life of Afghanistan. During President Ashraf Ghani's state visit to China, China committed to provide 2 billion yuan of grants to Afghanistan from up to the end of 2017, and train 3000 professionals in various fields up to 2020. China has clearly shown the willingness that it will not leave Afghanistan's hand at this crucial juncture, wherein it is in dire need of both political stability and economic support. At the same time, it is important to note that the announcement of around USD 3.5 billion by Metallurgic Corporation of China for the development of Aynak Copper mines is another important contribution that can have a lasting impact on the overall economy of Afghanistan.

Apart from economic and political support, China has always continued support for Afghanistan in different other sectors as well. Education and capacity building have been among the most important ones. China, during President Ghani's visit, also promised to provide 500 scholarships to students in the next five years.

In addition, the peace process with Taliban is being supported by China and China has given clear indication that its role would be assistive regarding the process. Thus, it is as clear as crystal that China's role is imperative for Afghanistan's peace, reconstruction and other sectors. It is vital that China, being a regional power, keeps on supporting Afghanistan for the promulgation of peace and tranquility as it would guarantee a more peaceful region.



We are 'Part of the Whole'

By Hujjatullah Zia

A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Currently, violation of human rights and dignity has been changed into common practice and people suffer painfully. The unmitigated militancy has put the life of mankind at stake. Terrorism, which resulted in large casualties within decades, has put mental pressure on men, women and triggered fear and anxiety around the globe. In other words, lack of acceptance and religious tolerance play a destructive role in current era.

The fundamental groups pigeonhole individuals and discriminate them accordingly. Humanity is at the risk of erosion since the gap is being widened among individuals on the grounds of their caste, color and creed and as well as among societies on the basis of political and economic interests.

Moral standards are likely to be declining. In another item, individual and collective interests and selfishness far outweigh moral values and humane practices. Despite committing indescribable acts of violence, one easily mollifies their conscience under fabricated ideologies. Do you what moral act is?

Morality is not something innate such as parental loves or emotional acts. When you feel hungry you eat something or you just love your friends emotionally - they are not called moral acts. If you feel sympathy and help a criminal escape from the law or police, you have done even immoral act. Morality originates in your reason and conscience.

You follow the reasonable orders of your wisdom, which is not colored by your sensation, it is called morality. But it should be noted that if you help someone as a reaction to his support or expecting something in favor, it is not called a moral act. Rather morality is a selfless act that you do for others without any expectations - which draws people's praise.

We don't only not do one a favor but also humiliate them and violate their rights in one way or another. We never call ourselves "part of a whole". We create rift on the basis of our religious and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, violence and honor-killings are committed against

women in different parts of the world. Rather than being treated as mother or sister, women fall the victim of gang violence, rape and mental and physical tortures. Patriarchal systems put a limitation on their social, political and cultural activities and treat them as an inferior creature. It should be noted that Man is not born wicked and vicious rather he bears a sense of virtue.

However, succumbing to worldly temptations, lust, power and financial interests, or believing in wrong ideologies divert them from the positive state of nature and force them in crime and corruption. Since the malevolent individuals are unable to resist the charms of idols on the surface of earth, they yield to their physical and sexual desires. Therefore, they break the religious values, moral taboos and social norm so as to satiate their desires.

Human rights are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being and which are inherent in all human beings regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status.

They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal, and they are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone. They require empathy and the rule of law and impose an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others. They should not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances, and require freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture and execution.

It is aptly said that "just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life." Hence, it is time for us to revive our conscience and polish our souls from the dirt of vice. There are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, i.e., the voice of conscience even though such obedience may cost many a bitter tear, and even more, separation from friends, from family, from the state to which you may belong, from all that you have held as dear as life itself. For this obedience is the law of our being.

If we do not fill our spiritual vacuum through positive way, we will certainly yield to evils.

Since men and women are bestowed natural rights and dignity, their rights must be respected regardless of their caste, color and creed. Indeed, we are "part of a whole" and human family and have to protect and respect our fundamental rights. It is also believed that when a society is void of moral values, men's life, liberty and dignity will be at great risk. Let us revive humanity and moral standards and hope for the best.

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France's Extraordinary Election

By Dominique Moisi

Sixty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, France is poised to hold an election that could make or break the European Union. A victory for the pro-EU independent centrist Emmanuel Macron could be a positive turning point, with France rejecting populism and deepening its connections with Germany. If, however, French voters hand the presidency to the far-right National Front's Marine Le Pen - who was, tellingly, just warmly received by Vladimir Putin in Moscow - the long European project will be finished.

Clearly, this is no ordinary French election. With the EU's survival on the line, the stakes are higher than in any election in the history of the Fifth Republic. So, does France's nationalist, xenophobic right have a real chance of coming to power?

To be sure, the National Front is well established in French political life. Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founded the party in 1972, and led it until 2011, when his daughter took over. But its electoral success has so far been limited. While Jean-Marie made it to the second-round runoff in 2002, he ended up losing badly when the center and the left united behind Jacques Chirac.

Like her father, Marine Le Pen is likely to make it to the second round in May; indeed, polls have her winning the most votes in the first round. Many remain confident that she will be defeated in the runoff: Macron is projected to win 63% of the vote in a head-to-head contest against Le Pen. But populist victories in 2016 - particularly the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump as US president - have shown that the unthinkable can happen.

In fact, the old French proverb, "never two without three," may seem to indicate that, after those two votes, a Le Pen victory is all but inevitable. Then again, maybe France will be the third electoral loss for extreme-right candidates, after those in Austria and the Netherlands, providing definitive proof that the populist tide can be resisted. Exceptional circumstances do sometimes favor the emergence of exceptional personalities, as in the 1930s - a tragic decade to which today's political hysteria has often been likened. But, like the proverbial "rule of three," the results can be negative or positive.

Just as US President Franklin D. Roosevelt emerged as a ray of hope during the worst economic crisis in America's history, Macron is spreading optimism among a French public disillusioned by a combination of violence, mediocrity, corruption scandals, and ideological confusion.

Macron's wife jokes that he takes himself for Joan of Arc, the French peasant who saved the country from the British in the Middle Ages.

Physically, Macron evokes more the young general, Napoleon Bonaparte, during his first campaign in Italy. Some see in Macron a romantic figure straight out of a Stendhal novel, a modern Fabrice del Dongo, who decides not to be a mere spectator of the world, but to act on it. He advances his mission through a combination of youthful energy, self-confidence, political cunning, technocratic competence, and a sense of moderation.

Macron embodies a sea change in French electoral politics: the erosion of the traditional cleavage between right and left. He is representing his own centrist movement (En Marche !).

No independent has ever won the French presidency, but, again, this is no ordinary election.

In fact, neither of the two main parties - the Socialists and the Conservatives (Les Republicains, as they now call themselves) - is likely even to reach the election's second round. This rejection of traditional parties echoes the rejection of Socialist President François Hollande, whose popularity sank so low (to just 4% at one point) that he opted not to seek another term, a first in the Fifth Republic's history. It is also reflected in the risk of substantial voter abstention, unusual for a country that takes presidential elections very seriously.

Many French have perceived this election as a kind of eternal reality-television show. It may be fascinating, but there is little confidence that the myriad issues that are shaping it, from unemployment to terrorism and security to retirement benefits to the moralization of political life, will be resolved. (Here lies another difference from previous elections, which were largely shaped by one or two major issues.)

Like Dongo - or Macron - the French people now will have their chance to go from spectators to autonomous actors. They can elect their candidate of hope, like Americans did in 2008, when they chose Barack Obama. Or they can elect their candidate of fear, like Americans did in 2016, when they chose Donald Trump.

In either case, the effects of their choice - like the choices of their American counterparts - will be felt by countless others.

Of course, France is not America; it is, for one thing, less strategically important to the world. But France is strategically vital to the EU.

And, in a sense, the composed and politically savvy Le Pen may be even more dangerous than the erratic political novice currently occupying the White House. That is why much of the world - at least the democratic part of it - is watching this most unusual of French elections unfold with bated breath. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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