

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



March 31, 2018

Culture and Corruption in Afghanistan Public Sector

Economic theories of corruption mainly focus on how the public servants and private citizens maximize their interests through illegal approaches causing harm to society as a result. Based on these theories, when the people return to corruption are high, as a result of weak institutions, the consequences of detection are limited, people are more willing to act corruptly. In addition to this, because finding a partner whom to engage with in a corrupt transaction and running away from detection or punishment becomes easier due to increasing the proportion of the corrupt individuals.

Of course, these theories provide a basis for policy debates, but leave many questions unanswered; they provide no clues on what types of institutions are important to prevent corruption and what roles they should have to ensure this? Should the attention of government be limited to formal institutions, for example, those ones enforced by law and order? Or should the government more focus on social norms and values?

What has practically been proven is that organizational culture plays a significant role on determining the type of organizations decision making; e.g to pursue corrupt acts or incline transparency.

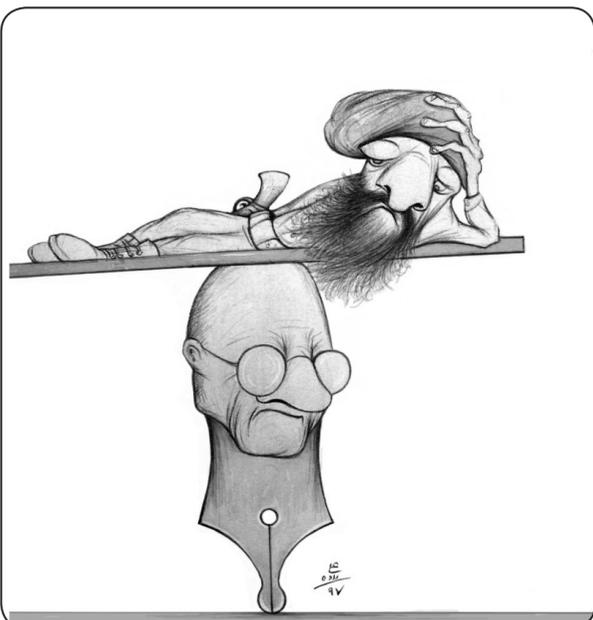
Afghanistan institutions have inherited a corrupt culture; a culture that roots in the historical context of the of Afghanistan governance system. The governance system of Afghanistan has been based on tribal norms and values; such norms and values do not consider all the people equal, and prefer their own tribal men to other people. Such a perception justifies unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. As a result, people who have limited access to the opportunities and resources seek to find other ways and means to access to these resources and opportunities denied to them by the corrupt public organizational structures.

Shaping a new public sector culture is time consuming and also requires a strong political will to bring fundamental changes in the sector. However, it is an issue that the international community has always put emphasis on it and the NUG has pledged to the international community that it will initiate systematic and structural changes in the public sector as well. But reforming the organizational culture and behavior, faces many challenges in the Afghanistan public sector that some are mentioned here.

Warlords are one of the main obstacles to reforming the public sector of Afghanistan. Warlords are in some key positions in the public sector institutions. These people have political and economic preferences in the corrupt culture of the public sector institutions; in some cases, they have some illegal militia that maintaining them require financial resources and the warlords support them financially through corrupt transactions. Mafia of contractors, they are the corrupt warlords and politicians that either are in high ranking public offices or are supported by the warlords and some influential politicians in the country. They usually get contracts based on corrupt practices and provide very low quality services to the public institutions. Therefore, they usually are not executed and this encourages other public officers to engage in corrupt acts too.

Weak and unclear laws, policies and procedures, is one of the other major cause of corruption in the public offices as a legacy of corrupt organizational culture, established in the past to ensure the interests of a specific group of the people; leading to preferring them to other people and ultimately undermining the economic development in a society.

Organizational culture plays a vital role in shaping the organizational behavior of the employees and the public too. As a corrupt organizational culture sustain the corrupt behavior and practices in an organization, a transparent and accountable organizational culture ensures the transparent transactions and public servants accountability and corruption free behaviors; as a basic foundation to ensuring social justice and fostering economic development in the concerned society.



Will the real Pakistan stand up, please?

By James M. Dorsey

Two headlines this month beg the question US officials have been grappling with for more than a decade: Will the real Pakistan stand up, please?

Pakistan's The News reported that the government had designated Islamabad as a pilot project to regulate Friday prayer sermons in the city's 1,003 mosques, of which only 86 are state-controlled, in a bid to curb hate speech, extremism and demonization of religions and communities.

The project is modelled on procedures in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt that are primarily intended to exert political control. The Islamabad project is in part designed to counter mounting criticism by the Trump administration, which has suspended funding to Pakistan, as well as growing unease in China over what Pakistani militancy could mean for its massive investment in the country.

It is also intended to support Pakistani efforts to evade blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a 37-member inter-governmental agency that polices adherence to anti-money laundering and funding of political violence measures.

The government has drawn up a list of 44 subjects on which prayer leaders should focus in their sermons. They include women rights; Muslim unity; Islamic principles of trade, cleanliness and health; concepts of an Islamic state; the importance of hard work, tolerance, and honesty; and the notion of the finality of the Prophet Mohammed.

The belief that Mohammed was the last prophet or Khatm-e-Nabuwwat is core to Muslim faith. Yet, it has allowed Sunni Muslim ultra-conservatives and others to whip up popular emotion in pursuit of political objectives, nowhere more so than in Pakistan where a draconian anti-blasphemy law has aided and abetted them.

The military late last year mediated an end to a weeks-long blockade of a main artery leading into Islamabad that disrupted traffic in multiple cities to protest a perceived softening of the government's adherence to Islam in a proposed piece of legislation. The protesters successfully called for the resignation of the justice minister for failing to refer to Prophet Mohammed in a constitutional bill.

The second headline reported that Islamabad High Court judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui demanded in a ruling that parliament "take measures which can completely terminate those who scar (the belief in Khatm-e-Nabuwwat)." Justice Siddiqui sits on the bench of a courthouse that last year had graffiti in a corridor demanding that blasphemers be beheaded. Mr. Siddiqui, who has defined blasphemers as terrorists, was ruling in a case brought before him by some of the protesters who had blockaded traffic that would effectively bar from public service Ahmadis, a sect considered heretic by orthodox Muslims because it views its 19th century founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, as a prophet.

Pressured by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan in 1974 excommunicated Ahmadis in a constitutional amendment that enshrined the principle of Khatm-e-Nabuwwat as integral to the Islamic faith. Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq criminalized Ahmadi practices a decade later by barring Ahmadis from "posing as Muslims" or using Islamic titles, greetings, scriptures or calls to prayer.

Mr. Siddiqui's ruling appeared to contradict the government's effort to get a grip on expressions of Sunni Muslim supremacism that amount to hate speech and discrimination of the other in a country in which extremism has been fuelled by intolerant, anti-pluralistic views.

The ruling, despite paying lip service to constitutional guarantees of "complete religious freedom, including all the basic rights of the minorities (Non-Muslims)" and the state's obligation to "protect their life, wealth, property, dignity and protect their assets as citizens of Pakistan," spotlights contradictions in the constitution.

On the one hand, the constitution recognizes the principle of Khatm-e-Nabuwwat. On the other, article 20 enshrines the notion of freedom of religion while article 27 bans discrimination in recruitment for public office. Without explicitly identifying Ahmadis, Mr. Siddiqui said it was "alarming" that "one of the minorities" was "often mistaken for being Muslims" due to their names and general attire. He warned that this "can lead them

to gain access to dignified and sensitive posts, along with benefits."

Human rights activists and lawyers have called for the ruling to be challenged in the Supreme Court. "This is clear hate speech. What is the judge asking them to be terminated from? Their jobs? Doesn't that take away their basic right to life and dignity?" said lawyer and human rights activist Jibran Nasir.

The plaintiffs in Mr. Siddiqui's case were supporters of Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a political front for Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLR), which glorifies Mumtaz Qadri, who was executed in 2016 for killing Punjab governor Salman Taseer because of his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Tens of thousands attended Mr. Qadri's funeral and his supporters have built a well-frequented shrine to honour him in his home town. Lawyers associated with TLP have instigated multiple blasphemy cases in Pakistani courts.

The Lahore-based Centre for Social Justice estimated that at least 1,472 people have been charged with blasphemy 1987 and 2016. Of the 730 Muslims charged, 501 were Ahmadis.

Activists and scholars argue that a rollback of the country's blasphemy law which applies the death sentence to those convicted is a requirement for Pakistan is serious about combatting extremism. A study by political scientist Nilay Saiya of 51 Muslim majority countries concluded that those that enforced anti-blasphemy laws were more susceptible to political violence.

"Both the concept of blasphemy and the prescription of any sort of punishment for its occurrence stand contrary to the Qur'an... The modern invocation of religious defamation laws stems from political leaders in Muslim-majority states...who have exploited such laws as a crafty way to use religion for political purposes including inflaming religious sensibilities, silencing criticism of the regime, generating patriotism, fostering national cohesion, co-opting Islamic supporters, and undercutting detractors," Mr. Saiya said.

Mr. Saiya argued that blasphemy laws encourage militants to attack with impunity individuals, homes, places of worship, and businesses of those believed to be blasphemers in the knowledge that the state will turn a blind eye to their actions.

"Violent non-state actors thus feel empowered to commit acts of terrorism with little or no fear of governmental reprisal because blasphemy laws, in effect, lend the authority of the state to religious figures and reinforce extreme views. Rather than control the forces of extremism, blasphemy laws appease and encourage them.

The result, expectedly, is that states that attempt to curry favour with radicals embolden them to take matters into their own hands; eventually such countries fall prey to violence carried out by those same radicals," Mr. Saiya said. "The vagueness of the (Pakistani) language concerning blasphemy allowed radicals to interpret the code in very loose ways and openly persecute those believed to be guilty of defiling, in any way, 'the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad'... Pakistan's blasphemy law thus opened the floodgate for extremism and terrorism which the government was unable to subsequently control," Mr. Saiya added. Given Mr. Saiya's analysis, both headlines represent Pakistan. The problem, however, is that the Pakistan that wants to reign in supremacism, hate speech and extremism has little chance of succeeding with out far-reaching political and legal change that would uproot the vested interests of the Pakistan that sees religious and political militancy as a useful tool. That may be a step too far for those interests even if they recognize a need to be seen to be advocating change with band-aid solutions like trying to control Friday prayer sermons.

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Education and its impact on Poverty in Afghanistan

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The Third World Countries compared to other countries may be even richer in terms of natural resources, but in terms of human resources, they are in extreme social poverty. The same poverty of human capital has caused countless misery for these countries. The social and political tensions that have emanated from these conditions, have always missed many of the opportunities provided for Third World countries. The reason is that the human resources needed to control and manage the opportunities have not been developed and provided to the labor market.

Therefore, third-world countries would never have the power to make a decision on how to manage their affairs in an improved manner, unless they integrate and shape a single common will in the country. The fact is that common belief provides the basis for common understanding, and common understanding produces common will which roots in public education level. In a developing world community, due to the lack of quality education, people's collective power of thought and understanding is very weak, and it is rarely formed in its factual sense. So the origin of all misery is formed from here and appears in various forms. Linguistic, regional, and ethnic tensions are part of the problems that arise because of the lack of mutual understanding and mutual recognition, and they are manifested violent behavior. This situation severely erodes the capacity of social tolerance that ultimately leads to discrimination and administrative corruption.

The first world countries, along with their historical course, have experienced this situation in a much more unfortunate and darker way, but they have already crossed this step. If we look at the history of these countries, the brightness begins when the sun of knowledge and public awareness has risen. As a result, wherever the light of knowledge becomes silent, the darkness of ignorance dominates human life.

In fact, internal conflicts in Afghanistan are shaped by a lack of understanding and logical analysis of the social phenomena in Afghanistan. To escape from this situation, there is no other way but promote education across the country. However, over the past years, unfortunately, enough attention has not been paid to this important matter. Even in some circumstances, the Ministry of Education has not been considered as a key ministry.

Of course, if we compare Afghanistan to the past, we will see significant changes, but the comparison of the situation with the past is not a scientific way of situation assessment. Yes, it can be a way to embody circum-

stance to the audience but the precise yardstick for progress is the reliable indicators announced by credible agencies, including the United Nations. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on education are a global benchmark that Afghanistan has also signed and committed to its implementation by 2030. The fourth goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development is "to ensure universal, fair and quality education and to promote educational opportunities for all."

The objective indicators for achieving this aim are that member countries should provide conditions that will ensure that all girls and boys get free, fair and quality schooling regardless of any considerations. However, it seems that realization of these indicators is very difficult for Afghanistan. But the Afghan government has taken some good steps to realize this goal, which is promising quantitatively. Last year, according to reports, more than 9.2 million students were enrolled to schools, of which 39% were female students, showing a relatively positive progress compared to the years following the fall of the Taliban.

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the government of Afghanistan has been failing in regard to providing quality education. According to the government, insecurity and war are the main problems of education in the country, which has so far deprived a large part of the country of the benevolence of education. Therefore, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups are the first and most important factors behind this ban. For sure, Taliban and the irresponsible armed groups have had a profound and negative impact on the development of knowledge and education in the country but quantity and quality is two distinct categories.

In many remote areas of the country, the Taliban and the extremist forces do not give any ground to the government for education, and it has negative consequences for the whole country.

By and large, the Afghan government has not been very successful in providing quality education, even in very secure and pro-literate areas. In some parts of Kabul and in the secure provinces of the country, there are many years in which children are fully inclined to seek literacy but after four decades, they are studying under burning sun or with unqualified teachers. On the part of the Afghan government, however, no serious attention has been paid to this, and there are likely to be very unnecessary discrimination that has not been left from the attention of social analysts. Therefore, social discrimination and violations of the law in contracts and financial and administrative matters can be considered as a major obstacle to fair and equitable education as the foundation of sustainable *Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com*

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