

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



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The Plights of Afghan Working Class

Afghanistan celebrated the International Labor Day on first of May while the plights of Afghanistan's working class have further intensified. Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world. The country saw perhaps an unprecedented wave of people fleeing the country. And the flow of people out of Afghanistan does not seem to be halted. Though many leave the country because of the Taliban insurgency and the deteriorating security conditions, there are also many who migrate due to the dire poverty and lack of employment. Generating sufficient employment was one of the main promises during 2014 presidential campaigns. And now, improving the lives of the ordinary Afghans by improving the country's economy and creating more jobs is a real challenge for National Unity Government (NUG) in its efforts to stabilize the country.

Creating new job opportunities has been stated as a key objective of the National Unity Government (NUG). However, the government seems far from being able to reach the stated goals and provide jobs for citizens. As it is like in other countries, celebrating the International Labor Day has become a norm in Afghanistan like many other celebratory programs that have minimal impacts on changing the lives of the Afghans. Officials at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled said that the government is committed to improve the status of the country's laborers and promote their rights. However, like many other areas the efforts to improve the economy and create more jobs have been lagging due to the enormous challenges existing like insecurity and the Taliban insurgency, corruption and inefficiency of the administration.

Aside from the insecurity and the ongoing war, the government has a large share of the responsibility for the failure to improve the lives of the people by creating jobs and using the existing potentials within the government and the private sector. The widespread corruption and nepotism and lack of good governance have significantly contributed to the failure to fulfill the promises made by NUG leader. There are hundreds of job-seekers with many of them having higher education who want to be employed but are desperate and helpless to find jobs. This is while, according to the government, there thousands of job positions in the government agencies and the ministries that remain vacant due to the lack of capacity in the government offices to manage and recruit new people.

A large portion of the population in Afghanistan lives under the poverty line. The situation has further deteriorated after the withdrawal of the foreign forces and the decline in the aid assistance by international community. Since 2014, the year when the national unity government took over power and the US concluded NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan, the situation has dramatically deteriorated with many people losing employments and seeing their lives getting worse. NUG has failed to prevent Afghanistan's economy from declining after the withdrawal of the most of the US-led NATO coalition. The government introduced some measures to encourage investments in the country. But those policies have been less effective to salvage the country's economy from declining as the investments have persistently decreased with investors remaining concerned over the country's political, security and economic prospects.

NUG did manage to sign some major trade and economic programs involving Afghanistan and a number of regional countries. Though crucial for Afghanistan's economy in the long run, however these projects are yet to produce results and help the government to prevent the sharp decline in employments and economic wellbeing of the Afghans. Those projects face a daunting test from the Taliban insurgency and the conflict in the country is going to remain a major threat for the implementation of these projects in the near future. The government of Afghanistan also needs to do more to utilize all other possible means for generating employment and using current potentials within the government and the public sector.

In Afghanistan the most imminent problem for many of worker class is lack of employment rather than quality of employment or the rights of laborers in the market.

Afghanistan has some legislation aimed on ensuring rights of the working class and preserving quality of employment. However, the laws remain insufficient and faulty. But the bigger problem is that laws are implemented. There is no culture of committing to rights and obligations from both the employers and employees. In addition to the high rate of unemployment, Afghanistan's working class remains one of the most deprived segments of the society in Afghanistan as there are no social security arrangements and no sufficient and robust legal mechanisms to support the laborers in the labor market and ensure their rights are preserved.

The government needs to refocus on the efforts to improve employment for the job-seeking Afghans and, in the meantime, work on promoting rights of the laborers. The government needs to do better to revive the public confidence over its performance. Lack of public confidence on the economic performance of the government would make it more difficult for the government to stabilize the country and defeat the Taliban insurgency.

By Dilawar Sherzai

Certain people are ranked high in a society because they belong to royal family, respectable caste or occupation. All the people and groups of people are not equally respected in a society. This position or rank is called status in the society. Every individual holds a certain position in his group and society with which he is affiliated. This position depends upon the duties he performs. These duties which create a position for him is called role. A status is a polar position socially attributed to a member of a group. And social role is the dynamic aspect of the corresponding status. Status is simply a collection of rights and duties. It is a cultural value attainable through the prescribed ways of behavior called social roles.

Status can be both ascribed and achieved. Ascribed status is the position which is assigned to individuals by culture, without reference to their innate abilities. Such status is attached with the physical existence of the individual. For instance, caste, age and sex are the ascribed statuses of the individual. They do not change and are mostly permanent in nature. They begin with the life and end with its end. Suppose a person is father of two children, brother of a particular person, father-in-law of another one, grandfather of his grandson and belong to a particular caste. These are a few of the ascribed statuses of that person. There are certain determinants of ascribed status. These include ancestry, sex, caste and age. The honor of a person's ancestry rests on legitimacy or illegitimacy, respect of the family and caste system. These are the factors of ascribed status. A child born in royal family is ultimately called a prince.

Biologically the sexes have different status in the society. The male is given higher position in order of status as compared to a female. This disparity of status is even wider in rural areas. Caste is another important element of status. Especially in rural areas, caste becomes the most important factor. The people attach caste with their names for distinction in community. Some castes are given higher status; while some others are considered lower in rank, which marks a divide among the castes. Moreover, it has been observed that aged people are given more respect and honor in most of the societies. On the other hand, youth are treated more affectionately and casually. These two different kinds of expressions and treatment of society towards two different age groups are because of their age group.

Achieved status on the other hand requires specific qualities from the individuals in role performance. These are not assigned to individuals by birth but are left open for competi-

tion and individual efforts. Culture provides certain ways and means for the achievement of certain status. The people compete each other to achieve that status. To become part of the parliament, for example, a person has to qualify certain preliminary conditions of nationality and candidature and win elections of the corresponding constituency. This is an example of achieve status. The university would not give degree to a person until he qualifies for all the conditions of the degree - study of the prescribed courses, and pass the proposed examinations. Hence to attain the status of degree holder, he will have to pass through the processes of time, money and labor. His efforts in this direction are his roles for the corresponding degree. Certain qualities and capabilities are required here to attain an achieved status.

Society does not assign status to people randomly. There is criteria of social approval or disapproval, honor or dishonor to people in societies. Generally, these are contained in social values. Those items of social life to which the people think important and worthwhile are the determinants of social status. Economic resource is one of the most important determinants of a person's social status. The economic possession of an individual can be measured and counted in easy terms and guessed easily as what status he enjoys in society. The more someone is economically resourceful, the greater the status he enjoys in the society.

Moreover, in our society the type of occupation by which one earns money is an important question. For example, the sweepers, brokers, barbers, cobblers and other menial servants are mostly considered inferior to the business owners, government officers and others.

In certain societies higher education is a mark of respect in society. The degrees and certificates held from college and university are symbols of status for the holder. Education itself is an end-value, and sometimes a mean for higher social prestige. The last but not the least is the power.

Power is the ability to control or influence the behavior of others. Those who attain more power in the society are treated more respectfully and their status is considered higher. For example, a police man is regarded more respectable compared to a school teacher. It is just because of the difference introduced by power.

A society would be considered a better society that would have more respect for achieved status, but that must be based on a person's hard work, capabilities and talents.

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The Stalemate of Peace Talks - A Threat to Democracy

By Hujjatullah Zia

The political conflict between Afghanistan and the Taliban elements stems from ideological differences. The Taliban's militant group has been radicalized and fed not to negotiate but to engage in violence and bloodshed. The group was established in a hotbed of terror under fundamental interpretations of religion either to impose their warp mind on people or to shed their blood without an iota of concern. On the other hand, however, Afghan government insists on the Taliban to resume reconciliation process and give up militancy. The government's tireless struggles yet to convince militants to hold talks.

Peace talk, as it was proved abortive, has been one of the hot issues for a long time. The four-nation group, which consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States, held many sessions without the Taliban's presence to bring them to the negotiating table. Despite this fact, the Taliban have launched "Omari Operation" in 2016 and refuse resuming peace talks. Pakistan failed to use "leverage" properly to convince the militants to sit around the negotiating table. Similarly, China's role was not constructive enough, as Afghans expected to be, in spite of spearheading the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG). Jayant Prasad, the Indian's ex-ambassador in Afghanistan, quoted China that Pakistan gave sacrifices in counter-insurgency and has close relations with China, it was said in response to the question, in an informal talk, that why China does not nudge Pakistan to convince the Taliban to hold negotiation.

Afghanistan's demands from Pakistan were very direct. In a trip to Pakistan in 2015, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani expressed the demands clearly: Pakistan would have to prevent the Taliban from spring offensive in 2015, Operate against the Heqqani network and bring the Taliban to negotiating table. To the Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, none of the demands were met. The Taliban inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan nation in 2015 and captured the Kunduz province in late September and attacked the Afghan Parliament in June. Moreover, they captured Sangin district and took large toll of Afghan soldiers. Moreover, Haqqani network was behind many terrorist attacks not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan and a wide operation against this terrorist network could alleviate terrorism both inside and out of the border. In terms of peace talks, Pakistan committed to nudge the Taliban to hold talks but the commitment was not fulfilled so far.

Prasad, whom I had a meeting with few days ago, said that China is involved in Afghanistan for two reasons. First, China has political interests in the country and second, it will seek to prevent from the infiltration of terrorism in its soil. He stated

that Afghanistan would better strengthen its constitution and usher in capacity building across the country rather than waiting for other countries to bring peace and security in this country. Indeed, an "Afghan-led" and "Afghan-owned" peace talk is the desire of Afghan officials on the condition that the neighboring countries play their constructive role in this regard.

The burgeoning democracy has encountered great barriers in the country and terrorism is a serious threat to it. The heavy casualties and war and violence going on across the country are a slap on the face of democracy. In other words, people fall prey to insurgency and their rights and freedoms are largely violated despite presidential and provincial elections and approval of constitution - which are significant elements of democracy. Moreover, there is a gap between state and nation and the government yet to gain the citizens' trust. The government will have to focus on the country's democratization and make efforts to protect the rights and liberty of every citizen. The citizens' vote should secure their life and freedoms, mainly the freedoms of thoughts and expressions. Hence, democratizing all aspects of social life should be the top priority for the government so as to gain the public trust and nourish the true spirit of democracy in the country.

Moreover, the transparency in election is highly crucial in a democratic system and gaining the public trust. The government has to initiate issuing electrical identity cards, which was delayed for mysterious reason, to ensure a transparent election and remove the barriers lying ahead of democracy. In a nutshell, a transparent electoral system will be highly helpful to a democratic administration and electrical IDs are constructive in this regard and in strengthening security across the country. So, besides focusing on peace process, these are the necessary measures to be taken to develop security.

Since peace talks were the last gleam of hope for Afghan nation, the neighboring countries and members of QCG will have to play their role in bringing peace in Afghanistan and break the stalemate by using their influence. It should be noted that a violent-free and democratic Afghanistan will be helpful for the neighboring countries too. Currently, Afghanistan is wrestling with the Taliban's Omari Operation and the nation will sustain great loss this year the same as 2015 despite seeking talks tirelessly.

It is still time for neighboring countries to prevent Taliban's Omari Operation and support democracy in Afghanistan. Afghan government should also consider holding talks with more flexible group - which can bury the ideological differences and recognize the legitimacy of the government - and persisting on talks with the same radical group/groups will never come to fruition.

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