

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



May 03, 2017

World Press Freedom Day

Every year, May 03 is celebrated as World Press Freedom Day, internationally. The purpose of the day is to highlight the importance of free press in democratic societies and to censure the attempts that are directed towards restricting or controlling the press for political purposes. The day also remembers the efforts of different journalists for the development and growth of media and press, and pay tribute to those journalists who lost their lives performing their duties.

The day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993, after the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference. Since then the day is celebrated each year with a particular theme. This year's theme for the Day is, "Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies." The world is going through critical times and in such a scenario, it is important for media and press to highlight the issues that human beings face in an unbiased and critical way so that truth should be disseminated. Moreover, the government and other authorities should make sure that they do not create hurdle for the journalists to collect relevant information, as every journalist has the right to gather information and every individual has the right to receive correct information.

It is also vital to protect freedom of press from censorship and surveillance overreach, and ensure the safety for journalism, online and offline. And this demand is not just a vague demand. It is based on the international law. Journalists, according to the Declaration of Rights and Duties of the Journalists, must have free access to all information sources, and the right to freely inquire on all events conditioning public life. Therefore, secret of public or private affairs may be opposed only to journalists in exceptional cases and for clearly expressed motives. And, any factor hindering the journalists from having access to all information sources must be considered illegal and should be eliminated.

Moreover, the journalist have the right to refuse subordination to anything contrary to the general policy of the information organ to which he collaborates such as it has been laid down by writing and incorporated in his contract of employment, as well as any subordination not clearly implicated by this general policy. And, the journalists cannot be compelled to perform a professional act or to express an opinion contrary to his convictions or his conscience.

The claim of the rights of the press or journalists is not only advantageous for them but for the entire society. If press and journalists are free to do their job they can support in identifying the facts and figures within the society, which will portray a complete picture and also assist in finding out the deficiencies. Unless, people have the true picture of the socio-political conditions, it is very difficult to have awareness and be able to play a positive role within the society.

There is a sort of ill-intention behind imposing hindrances in the way of press freedom. There are certain factions within the society that do not intend that the people should know about their activities and their intentions; therefore, they make efforts to ban or hinder the media. By doing so they make sure that their evil deeds remain concealed and do not receive attention.

Sometimes, the governments, themselves, suggest or impose ban or restrictions on media. It is because of the fact that they do not like criticism on what they do. They fear that if press and media disclose their activities or the shortcomings in their policies and practices, the public opinion may turn against them and they may lose popular will or even legitimacy.

On some other occasions, certain strata in society, having the support of the government or the certain administrative units pressurize the press so that they do not go against their wills. They may have certain intentions or objectives that are only for their own personal benefits or may even involve illegal practice or the violation of the constitution; therefore, they through the government machinery impose bans and restrictions on the press so that their motives are not disclosed.

Ill-fatedly, Afghanistan is also one of the countries that have not been giving enough heed to the freedom of the press and the rights of the journalists. The war and conflicts and the negligence of the relevant authorities have resulted in poor development in media sector and particularly in press. Moreover, different sorts of discrimination against the journalists have continued in different parts of the county. Afghan government, different organizations and groups both national and international must make sure that they strive to make efforts in bringing about real changes for the development of press in the country and must protect the rights of the journalists as they are not a party to the conflict and do not serve anyone's purpose.

Provided that the rights of the journalists are protected, it is important that the journalists must fulfill their responsibilities in the best possible manner. They are required to respect truth whatever be the consequence to themselves, because of the right of the public to know the truth; defend freedom of information, comment and criticism; and report only on facts of which they know the origin of; not to suppress essential information nor alter texts and documents and not to use unfair methods to obtain news, photographs or documents.

Hekmatyar – A Notable Figure

By Mohammad Sarwar Jawadi

Afghanistan's peace agreement with the emir of Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has led to controversial debates and triggered anti and pro-HIA feelings. Emotions of love and hatred fluctuate. His photos, posted on the cyberspace, are either kissed by his proponents or distorted with paints by his opponents in Kabul city. Many political pundits feel no doubt that Hekmatyar's return is a project; however, there are several interpretations and views about this project and its result. The questions are: Who will be backed or harmed by this project? Who will lead this? Is he controllable? These are the main questions of the controversy.

During the jihad, Hekmatyar was under suspicion of having hands in gloves with the countries being backed by the Soviet Union. No leader was accused of war and violence, mainly of firing missile at Kabul as seriously as Hekmatyar. On the contrary, he accused his strong opponents, including Ahmad Shah Masoud, of making agreement with Russians. He also sought to dismantle Kabul through gaining influence in the government's body or resort to coup in favor of HIA.

The coup d'état carried out by Shah Nawz Tani against Najib government was strongly backed by HIA. This coup was suppressed with the officials and forces of Shura-e-Nizar led by the martyred Masoud. According to Masoud's interview with Spiegel Magazine, 1500 members of HIA were killed.

Hekmatyar accused Masoud of making agreement with Russians and backing Kabul government. On the other hand, Masoud claimed that Hekmatyar intended to dismantle Dr. Najib's government and gain power to support Pashtun tribe. Such understandings led to hostile competition between the two jihadi groups. That is to say, the ideology of jihad for deity, freedom and country was changed into tribal issue.

Hekmatyar's understanding of Masoud was on the basis of peace agreements made with Russians. Similarly, Masoud's mistrust stemmed from Soliman Laiq's trip to Paktia and his meetings with Hekmatyar – who condemned Masoud and his ilk for carrying out heavy attacks in Jalalabad and Logar and also his key role in Abdul Rashid Dostum's group. It is said that these suspicion and mistrust changed the ideology of jihad and rule of sharia into ethnocentrism and affected the Kabul's communist government and its army, which also showed tendency towards ethnicity and paved the ground for the fall of Kabul government.

Some mujahedeen theorists believe that Hezb-e-Khalq and Parcham stoked the ethnic tension rather than mujahedeen. In short, these issues broke conflicts among jihadi groups and there are still ethnic-based and non-national political tendencies. Pakistan is also believed to play a central role in this regard. Hekmatyar was an appropriate person for being replaced by Russians' pawn and leading Afghanistan.

For his radical view, however, the mujahedeen group residing Peshawar did not involve him in Mujahedeen's interim government. Likewise, the mujahedeen residing Iran did not share a

friendly relation either. Therefore, Hazrat Mujaddadi and then Burhanuddin Rabbani led the government. The Kabul government collapsed by jihadi groups and Hezb-e-Wahdat group also took the control of some parts in Kabul. The active presence of Ahmad Shah Masoud and Gen. Dustum's forces – backed by Sayyaf men and Harakat-e-Inqilab, Mahaz-e-Melli and Jabh-e-Nijat parties – pushed HIA out of Kabul.

The game of Jamiat-e-Islami and army forces constituting mainly from Tajik was fruitful up to then. But some errors were made following the withdrawal of HIA from Kabul. Jamiat made struggle to deny other parties, too, in Kabul, which ensued bloody wars, death and destructions in the same city and other provinces. The ethnic tensions went beyond organizational games to the extent of genocide and committing war crimes and went from soldiers to civilians. HIA formed a coalition with Hezb-e-Wahdat and Junbish – both sustained heavy attacks by Jamiat. This coalition could neither let him to Kabul nor supported by fundamental parties in Pakistan army.

After this disappointment, another group was involved in the game, which had radical, ideologue view and also Pashtun-oriented view. With the emergence of the Taliban group in Afghanistan, Hekmatyar abandoned the arena without violence and bloodshed and went behind screen up to now.

Hekmatyar cherished an inflexible view with political and revolutionary Islamic ideology in accordance with interpretations of Syed Qutb and Hasan al-Bana and other intellectual leaders of Ekhwan-ul-Moslimeen. Nonetheless, he changed his view after Russians' withdrawal and entered Kabul joining hand with generals belong to Khalqi and Parchami parties. In civil unrests, he adopted the posture of freedom-fighters and patriot and spoke about the equal rights of citizens alongside the martyred Mazari and Dostum. He introduced Mazari as almost unique and national leader but never approved legitimacy for the Taliban.

Unlike his past, now he does not emphasize on the complete withdrawal of foreign troops and speaks about justice, the rights of citizenship of all Afghans, peaceful life and establishment of a strong government on the basis of people's votes. So, attributing war, violence and bloodshed only to Hekmatyar is not fair. He was not the only factor of civil unrests or one stoking tribal morale or splintering the nation. He was part of bitter and bloody incidents which were in progress within two decades.

No one has the right to justify themselves through pointing figure at Hekmatyar. He was pushed from the power and others gained it. Hekmatyar displayed a different personality in the history of this land. Still he has come to the political arena as a project. Denying him is as dangerous as loving him blindly. He is neither the mujahed of 1360s nor the leader of 70s but the player of new period and has to be pondered upon.

The US also will be back since its flag, which was taken down in 2014, was poised again in Helmand. Daesh is also a new phenomenon. It should be noted that Hekmatyar has returned with new personality. All the return should not be escorted with swear or admiration but must be pondered deeply.

Women in the Green Economy

By Isabella Lövin and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

In Ghana, a group of enterprising women and young people is building bicycles out of an unlikely material: bamboo. Ten farmers grow the bamboo, and 25 builders craft it into environmentally friendly bikes that can be used on Ghana's bumpy roads or exported overseas. Bernice Dapaah, the founder and CEO of Ghana Bamboo Bikes, plans to build two new factories soon, adding 50 more workers in communities with high unemployment. Ghana Bamboo Bikes is just one example of the major role women can play in driving the transition toward sustainable economic growth and development. But such examples increasingly need to go together if we are to ensure a prosperous future on a healthy planet.

The world needs more women climate leaders, whether around the tables where policy is made or at the helm of businesses, steering them toward sustainability.

When more women work, economies grow. According to the World Economic Forum, greater gender equality, which implies greater use of human capital, correlates positively with per capita GDP, competitiveness, and human development. Squandering that capital has the opposite effect: the United Nations Development Programme reports that gender inequality costs Sub-Saharan Africa, to name one example, \$95 billion (or 6% of GDP) per year, on average.

Yet women around the world still face a massive gender gap in employment and wages. The proportion of women participating in the global labor force has hovered around 50% since 1990, compared to more than 75% for men. And, in most countries, the women who work earn, on average, only 60-75 cents for every dollar that men earn.

To support economic growth and development, we need to tap the potential of all workers, giving women opportunities not just to earn, but also to lead. Women need to be empowered, and their role in the economy transformed. What better moment to achieve this than now, when the world is pursuing another economic transformation, toward a green economy? In fact, transforming women's role in the economy could be even more urgent in the context of climate change.

Traditional divisions of responsibility mean that men and women are often affected differently by climate change, particularly in developing countries.

Because men are more likely to perform wage labor or farm cash crops, a climate-driven event like drought may cost them their wages and force them to move to cities to find employment. Women, who are often responsible for growing local subsistence crops and taking care of their families, do not have that option. Instead, women must find alternative means of securing food locally and of generating income to support their families, such as selling small assets or even withdrawing their children from school to help. The challenges women face are exacerbated in regions where women already spend hours each day fetching drinking water, and changing rainfall patterns could force women to travel even farther for it.

Against this background, it is crucial to empower women to

seize the opportunity presented by the transition to a sustainable economy. Changes in four key areas could prove particularly valuable.

First, women need greater access to the financial system. In Sub-Saharan Africa, men are 30% more likely than women to have a bank account. To close this gap, we need to design loans and savings vehicles with more flexible requirements that work for women. This includes, for example, the expansion of micro-credit – an approach that has already enabled women in many countries to become entrepreneurs.

Achieving this requires convincing still-skeptical creditors that women are dependable – and, indeed, valuable – clients, including by citing data on microcredit, which prove that women repay loans as reliably as men, if not more so. Once women gain access to the financial system, they can create and invest in small businesses, while feeling more secure about dipping into savings when confronted with emergencies. Second, women need equal rights to land. Ownership of land – whether co-ownership, for a married woman, or sole ownership, for a single female head of household – not only improves economic security and productivity, but also boosts access to traditional finance. With a formal claim to the land they are farming, women are also more likely to invest in the fertility of the soil, contributing to more productive and sustainable land-use patterns.

Third, women need policies that support their active participation in the emerging green economy, including better education, skills training, and protections against workplace discrimination. Because the clean-energy industry is so new, it could help draw women into non-traditional higher-paid jobs like engineering.

Finally, women need to be empowered politically. If half the population doesn't have a say in political decisions, the legitimacy of policymaking suffers. Women can play an important role as governments implement incentives and regulations that support the transition to a sustainable and inclusive economy. Even without such support, women are already seizing the opportunity presented by this transition. Solar Sister is a social business that has created jobs for 2,500 women selling affordable solar lighting in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda. Lumos, another solar solution, empowers women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. But women still don't comprise a large enough share of the workers in the clean-tech industry, and those who do work in that industry are generally low on the job ladder.

Changing that – enabling all citizens to meet their economic potential – will require active efforts to promote women's social and political inclusion.

Closing the gender gap is the right thing to do for women and the planet. It is also smart economics. Let's not miss this opportunity. (Courtesy Smart Syndicate)

Isabella Lövin is Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Finance Minister of Nigeria and Managing Director of the World Bank, is currently Board Chair of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and a member of the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.