

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



May 08, 2016

Reintegrating Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan seems to be getting serious again. Escalation in insecurity and the political disorder has made many doubt about the future. The expectations that there could be any sort of reconciliation with Taliban have been shattered into pieces and the National Unity Government (NUG) does not seem to have real unity. There are evident differences between the offices of the President and the Chief Executive Officer. Moreover, there are differences among the team members of the same office as well. This has become evident in the current controversy regarding the change of route in TUTAP project.

After there were suggestions by certain governmental authorities that the route would be changed from the central region to the Salang pass, the people in Bamyan have started fearing that they would be deprived of the benefits that could be generated by the project. Moreover, the leaders in the government have also shared their concerns regarding the change in the route. Both Haji Muhammad Mohaqiq and Sarwar Danish have mentioned that they would end their cooperation with the NUG if the route of the project is changed.

And, there are many other issues as well where there are marked differences among the members of NUG. From the issue of election reforms to the reconciliation process with Taliban, almost all the members seem to have their own views and conditions. In such a scenario it is very difficult to create unity in the government and then among the people, which is very much important for the future of the country. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society and there has to be a comprehensive process of national reintegration so as to strengthen the roots of national harmony. However, that has been neglected by the authorities in Afghanistan and they have kept on chanting the slogan of reconciliation process. Attending the issue of reconciliation without dealing with the problem of reintegration is like putting the cart before the horse.

Political stability and harmony are the most important factors for the integration of the nation. Nonetheless, achieving such a position is a far cry and the present attitude of Afghan government and its Western allies are further deterring the process. Currently, many crucial decisions that were made on behalf of the government, mostly did not have the consent of all the NUG members. Moreover, there are very serious questions about the current structure and its future. Initially it was decided that the setup would continue for two years and then there would be grand Jirga where the Chief Executive Officer would be given a position similar to a prime minister in a parliamentary system. However, the preparations do not seem complete for such a process, neither the parliamentary elections are on the schedule. Few even fear that the government would not be able to convene the elections because of the differences and the lack of resources, or elections would be conducted in a fraudulent way.

For the reintegration of Afghan society it is necessary that all the major social and political groups within the Afghan society must start feeling a sense of attachment with the social, political and economic lives of the country. The reintegration of the Afghan society is only possible through a separate process – it can neither be the outcome of a miracle nor the result of the reconciliation process alone as is mostly thought. At the present scenario, even it seems improbable that the reconciliation process may reach to any sort of viable agreement with Taliban, let alone the integration of the entire nation. For reintegration to happen it is necessary to bring about some very basic structural changes within the Afghan political setup. One of the most basic of them is a true democracy within the country that has the capacity to represent different ethnic and minority groups appropriately so that heterogeneous Afghan society must be integrated within a single whole. Different ethnic and minority groups will not be integrated within the society if they are kept away from participating within the affairs of the country and the most crucial decisions of the nation. Therefore, it can be said that the reintegration process is a two-fold process. Along with making these groups the part of the ongoing reconciliation process, there have to be important political amendments within a short span of time; otherwise, neither reintegration will take place nor will reconciliation produce any fruitful outcome. In fact, the reintegration of Afghan society is a phenomenon that is much wider than the reconciliation process. For it to happen; there has to be consistent efforts and a true democratic system assisted with socio-economic stability and cultural integration. However, it cannot be said that reconciliation process, which is narrower in scope, is totally ineffective on the Afghanistan's reintegration. Rather, at the moment, it is one of the factors that will have a very important influence on the future of reintegration process in Afghanistan but it is important that the process must be led keeping the same concept in mind. Integrating all the important factions of Afghan society within the ongoing reconciliation process will definitely result in a promising episode in the reintegration of Afghan society.

The Lagging Anti-corruption Campaign

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the efforts to curtail and eliminate corruption in Afghanistan facing enormous challenges, the Afghan government has recommit to lead the campaign against corruption and ensuring rule of law. President Ashraf Ghani told a one-day anti-corruption conference in Kabul on Friday May 06, 2016 that the Afghan government was determined in fighting corruption and is going to enhance efforts to eliminate the phenomenon in the country. In the conference 'The Way Ahead for Anti-Corruption in Afghanistan', that was attended by a delegation of European donors, Ghani hinted he has authorized a special police unit to investigate and scrutinize high-ranking government officials including ministers, governors and other senior government officials. Ghani also said the government was cautiously considering a plan to establish a specialized anti-corruption justice center to boost the anti-corruption campaign. President Ghani's remarks over his commitment to fight corruption come at a time when the international supporters of Afghanistan have been calling on the Afghan government to do more and make the anti-corruption efforts a priority. In its latest report, the transparency advocacy group Transparency International once again ranked Afghanistan among the most corruption nations in the world. Many believe that the national unity government has failed in fulfilling its pledges to effectively fight corruption and the ensure rule of law in the country. Fighting corruption and promotion of rule of law were among the key objectives of President Ghani when he came to power two years ago. However, the efforts have led to nowhere as corruption remains pervasive and the government has been unable to curb the trend. Afghanistan again becoming one of the three most corrupt nations in the world is clearly indicating the failure of the efforts to eliminate corruption.

Fighting corruption in a top-down manner starting from the highest levels of the government was President Ghani's first and inevitable choice in starting to lead a forceful anti-corruption campaign. And this tends to be the most difficult part of government's leadership of the anti-corruption campaign. The anti-corruption policy of the national unity government is characterized by impulsive and arbitrary approach rather than focusing on establishing a broader and more comprehensive national strategy for promoting the fight against corruption. The strategy has already shown as completely ineffective and a total failure as the government's efforts has failed to produce any tangible results in reducing corruption in the country.

Partly aimed on publicity, President Ghani's efforts for promoting anti-corruption fight, governance and rule of law were started with surprise visits to army and police headquarters, government offices and other public institutions. The national unity government's quick move to deal with the corruption case of Kabul Bank as the country's most notorious financial scandal brought praise for the new government and came as a sign of the unity government's resolve for fighting corruption. Ghani followed with starting scrutinizing major procurement and financial agencies of the government which culminated by suspending some high-ranking officials from their posts and referring their case to judicial authorities. There were

broach expectations that the government would remain steadfast in purging corrupt officials and further extending the campaign.

However, the government's anti-corruption approach was seriously challenged by the very high-ranking officials and the country's political elite. Due to divisions within the government and lack of broader political support to the government's anti-corruption campaign, the government failed to create a momentum in the anti-corruption efforts and establish a nationwide strategy for fighting corruption. The refusal to the political community to accompany and support government policies in fighting corruption led the efforts to gradually weaken as the government was left unable to promote the campaign. The increasing political and economic challenges further debilitated the efforts and virtually derailed one of the highly publicized plans of the national unity government.

In the anti-corruption conference, Ghani has said that corruption was a major hurdle ahead of the country's development, asserting that his government would not spare any efforts to combat it. Corruption and development have direct impacts on each other. The pervasive corruption in Afghanistan remains a profound challenge for the development efforts in the country while development successes will in turn help curbing corruption. The ongoing war in the country and the economic woes of Afghanistan potentially undermines any efforts to contain corruption. The Afghan government is going to continue tackling with the Taliban insurgency for the coming years and maybe for decades compounding the challenges for the government to fight corruption and promote rule of law.

The national unity government has recognized some key government offices such as procurement, recruitment, financial and policy making offices as highly prone to corruption, and therefore, the main priority of the government. However, what the national unity government is going wrong is the way it is handling the anti-corruption efforts. The government needs to institutionalize the anti-corruption campaign by establishing a long-term oriented and comprehensive plan with focus on turning the efforts into a grassroots move within the government and public agencies led and directed by the central government. In the meantime, the government needs to remain focused on a sustainable anti-corruption campaign while remaining engaged with dealing the insurgency and other challenges existing in the country.

Afghanistan is not going to overcome the phenomenon of corruption unless the government changes course in the fight against corruption. The ongoing efforts led by the government would lead to nowhere. It is time for the government to improve coordination with the international community and use world's successful experiences. The efforts need consensus and political support at home. The government needs to do more to promote consensus on supporting government anti-corruption initiatives. The national unity government has taken concrete measures in enhancing transparency in key government and public agencies. However, it has fallen short of institutionalizing the anti-corruption campaign. The anti-corruption campaign is a race against time in Afghanistan. The pervasive corruption is threatening survival of the country. The government needs to do more to contain the threat.

Abdul Ahad Bahrami is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at ahad.bahrami@gmail.com

Violating the Rights of Working-class

By Hujjatullah Zia

The fruits of workers' struggles were gained by upper-class throughout the history. Workers have been sweating in big companies from dawn to dusk but gained low wage in return without a contract or law to protect their rights and dignity. Women and children labored in farms and companies twenty-four/seven and put all their energy into backbreaking works to earn bread and butter. Justice and human dignity had no meaning for the upper-class and even some women were abused sexually by the company-owners. Suffering from manual labors on one hand and being treated unjustly and earning low wage on the other hand pressurized the employees mentally and physically.

Since the industrial revolution, the labor movement has been concerned how economic globalization would weaken the bargaining power of workers, as their employers could move to hire workers abroad without the protection of the labor standards at home.

Following World War one, the Treaty of Versailles contained the first constitution of a new International Labor Organization (ILO) founded on the principle that "labor is not a commodity", and for the reason that "peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice".

The regulation of working time is one of the oldest concerns of labor legislation. Already in the early 19th century it was recognized that working excessive hours posed a danger to workers' health and to their families. The very first ILO Convention adopted in 1919, limited hours of work and provided for adequate rest periods for workers. Today, ILO standards on working time provide the framework for regulated hours of work, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual holidays. These instruments ensure high productivity while safeguarding workers' physical and mental health. Standards on part-time work have become increasingly important instruments for addressing such issues as job creation and promoting equality between men and women.

Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations draw on international labor standards to call for changes in policy, law or practice. Finally, a number of countries and regional organizations have incorporated respect for international labor standards into their bilateral, multilateral and regional trade agreement.

In addition to shaping law, international labor standards can provide guidance for developing national and local policies, such as employment and work and family policies. They can also be used to improve various administrative structures such as labor administration, labor inspection, social security administration, employment services and so on.

The philosophy behind emergence of labor law is to support the rights and dignity of workers. It should be noted that the labor law is imperative, which means that it is so strict that employees and employers cannot agree against it and have to sign the contract in according with this law.

Since the labor law creates a just and humane relation between working-class and upper-class, it will reduce war and violence to a large extent. Although the initial aim of labor law was to necessarily protect the rights of the laborer, it now also supports the rational and legal benefits of the company-owners and employers. The labor law introduces a set of international rules such as the rights to free choice of jobs, appropriate salary/wage, enjoying holidays and having secure and sanitary environment and forbids forced and underage labors.

The principle of man's natural dignity irrespective of his racial, ethnic and sexual backgrounds reduces the differences among the mankind, mainly the gap between the working-class and the upper-class. Moreover, justice – which has been the desire of cultures, social reformers and spiritual leaders – plays a crucial role in relations between the two classes. Cultivating fair relationship between the employees and employers will create job stability and establish welfare in a society. Similarly, social order, which originates from growth in production and creating stable and satisfactory job, will lead to public welfare.

Many countries, including Afghanistan, approved their national laws on the basis of international labor law so as to protect the rights of the vulnerable part of a community that is the working-class and let not their fruits of hard-work be exploited by the company-owners.

Afghanistan also considers workers' rights and dignity and designated penalty for the violators. As a result, Afghanistan's Constitution states in article 48 as, "Work is the right of every Afghan. Working hours, paid holidays, employment and employee rights and related matters shall be regulated by the law. Choice of occupation and craft shall be free within the bounds of law." Moreover, it also forbids forced labor, mainly on children. The question is that do people follow the law?

The workers' rights and dignity would not be trampled upon if people and employers followed the labor law properly. Despite national and international laws – which support the working-class – forced labor, child labor, long-hour works without extra payment, exploiting the energy of underclass and violating their rights still rule across the country. The poor succumb to work long hours in return for low wage, especially when the public wrestle with unemployment and encounter financial crisis.

The government, which has committed to "design and implement effective programs for developing industries" and "expanding production" for raising the standard of citizens' life, failed to fulfill the mouth-watering commitments. Hence, only setting penalty and punishing the violators of workers' rights will not alleviate the challenges, the government must provide job opportunities for citizens, develop agriculture, handicrafts, and animal husbandry, improve forests, build factories and perform all the commitments made in the Constitution to prevent from forced and child labors and provide welfare for the public.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com



Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net

افغانستان
The Daily Afghanistan

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.