

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

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## 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 Bamyán 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.

## Public Opinion can Help to Provide a Better Future

By Dilawar Sherzai

Public opinion is formed both by relatively permanent circumstances and by temporary influences. Among the former are the ideas that characterize the popular culture of a given place at a given time. Permanent circumstances, like race, religion, economic status, geographical location and educational level can strongly influence the opinions of an individual or a particular group about many subjects. Certain temporary factors also affect the public's attitudes.

Among these are the impact of current events, the opinions of influential or authoritative persons, the effect of the mass communication and the concerted campaigns of public relations professionals. Public Opinion may be defined as, "Attitudes, perspectives and preferences of a population towards events, circumstances and issues of mutual interest". Public opinion plays an important role in the working of the democratic system as the truly democratic systems are formed with the support of the people and they follow the famous definition, "Government of the people, for the people and by the people."

In the modern states of the world the governments and political institutions always have a close look at the public opinion and variations in it after major policies and political changes and they use the same to guarantee their success and effectiveness of their policies. Moreover, the best use of public opinion comes at the time before the elections and mostly makes the political parties take important decisions before the elections are finalized.

It is difficult to say what public opinion is as it is not possible that all the citizens in a society should have coherent and unanimous opinion regarding the changes and realities and socio-political life of the society. It, at the same time, is not necessarily the opinion of the majority as there are possibilities that majority may promote its own interests and may neglect the interests of the minority. In true sense public opinion is the considered opinion of an effective majority of citizens based on the ideal of general well-being and progress of the community as a whole.

Public opinion is gauged through the public polls. The systematic measurement of public attitudes was a 20th-century development.

Although occasionally, polls were conducted before the 1930s, they were generally neither systematic nor scientific. Since 1948 techniques of public opinion research and polling have improved considerably. Efforts are now made to select respondents without bias, to improve the quality of questionnaires and to train able and reliable interviewers.

Opinion polls are generally accepted as useful tools by business, the mass media, government and academic research, beside the political organizations. In business, polls are used to test consumers' preferences and to discover what it is about a product that gives it appeal. Response to commercial polls aid in planning marketing and advertising strategies and in making changes in a product to increase its sales.

In politics, polls are used to obtain information about voters' attitudes toward issues and candidates, to put forward candidates with winning potential, and to plan campaigns. Polling organizations have also been successful in predicting the outcome of elections. In addition, by polling voters on election day, it is often possible to determine the probable win-

ner even before the voting booths close.

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are heavy users of public opinion polling information, especially political information that helps to predict elections or gauge the popularity of government officials and candidates. The public's attitude toward various social, economic and international issues is also considered newsworthy. On the other hand governments use opinion polls to tap public sentiment about issues of national interest. In addition, government agencies use polling methodology to determine unemployment rates, crime rates and other social and economic indicators.

There are different agencies within the societies that mould and shape the public opinion. Some of them are;

(1) The Press – it is regarded as one of the most forceful agencies which mould the public opinion. It includes all the daily newspapers, fortnightly, monthly, periodicals and other published material. They not only place before the public the facts about various social, political and other activities going on at the national as well as international levels but also make suggestions for improvements.

(2) Educational Institutions – Educational institutions like schools, colleges, study circles, debating societies and universities exert tremendous influence on the formulation of the public opinion. These institutions play an important role in developing the qualities of independent thinking among young people. (3) Radio, TV and Cinema – They not only keep the people informed about the various important happenings but also arrange periodical talks by experts on various problems of topical interest and many programs that address the social, political, economic and other problems of the people and suggest them the ways to deal with them.

(4) Political Parties – they play no less significant role in the formation of the public opinion. They focus the attention of the people on the important issues facing the country with a view to win fresh adherents to their point of view. In the process they not only help the people to acquire firsthand information about the various public issues but also provide them to take interest in those affairs. (5) Legislature – The legislature in a democratic country plays a vital role in building and molding public opinion. The various problems facing the country are thoroughly discussed on the floor of the legislature. The ruling and the opposition parties present the two sides of the picture. These debates and discussions are reported in detail in the press and exert great amount of influence on the people.

For the better and positive public opinion it is necessary that the agencies mentioned above must be developed and they should be made as much democratic as possible.

If the nature of the public opinion in Afghanistan is studied closely, there are drawbacks. The public opinion in the country is not based on the careful and scientific analysis; rather it is mostly based on biases, propaganda, sentiments, rumors and whims, which show that the civil society is not nourished appropriately in the country. The lengthy history of instability and disturbances in the country and the repeated mistakes of the authorities to counter them have made the serious minds think very negatively of them and they have no hope that they will be able to shoulder the responsibility of providing a better future to the country.

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## From the Front Lines of Climate Change

By Loren Legarda and Marcela Guerrero

On April 22, dignitaries representing no fewer than 175 parties signed the global climate change agreement concluded in Paris in December, setting a record for the adoption of an international accord. The show of support is heartening. It provides hope that the momentum that led to the breakthrough deal in December remains undiminished.

But securing an agreement in Paris was just the first step on a long road towards protecting the global climate and the world's most vulnerable countries. The signing ceremony was the second. Next comes the ratification process; 55 countries, representing at least 55% of global emissions, will need to ratify the agreement to enable it to enter into force.

The good news is that the process is already underway. In February, Fiji became the first nation to ratify the treaty, followed by three other small island states. All four are members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a group of 43 countries – including Costa Rica and the Philippines, which we represent – on the front lines of climate change. Members of the forum fought tirelessly for an agreement in Paris, and we will do everything within our power to speed up its entry into force.

The Paris agreement offers the world its best hope of slowing and ultimately stopping changes to our climate. Left unchecked, global warming will threaten the health and safety of our people, damage the ecosystems on which we all depend, and – through rising sea levels – put the very existence of some countries in jeopardy.

And yet, if the battle against climate change is to be won, the Paris agreement will not be sufficient. The voluntary emission-reduction commitments contained in the so-called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), submitted by 187 countries by the end of the talks, will not be enough to prevent dangerous climate change.

And for those countries that are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of global warming, far more needs to be done if catastrophic effects are to be avoided.

Early calculations have suggested that if all of the INDCs were fully implemented, average global temperatures would still rise by the end of the century to 2.7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. That is considerably beyond the already dangerous ceiling of two degrees set in Copenhagen in 2009 and

included in the Paris agreement.

New research, from Climate Interactive and MIT Sloan, suggests that temperatures could rise even higher – by 3.5 degrees Celsius. The Climate Vulnerable Forum has long argued that even two degrees of warming risks creating unbearable conditions for some countries. That is why it has fought to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees – an ambition that was included, thanks to the forum's efforts, in the Paris agreement.

That seemingly small difference matters. As the latest research shows, it would have a dramatic and measurable impact on extreme weather events, water availability, crop yields, coral-reef degradation, and sea-level rise. And it will be the most vulnerable people – rural women, the sick, the old, and the very young – who are most at risk. For the world's most vulnerable countries, limiting the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees is not just an aspiration; it is a matter of survival.

The goal is an ambitious one. But vulnerable developing countries are committed to helping achieve it. The V-20 group of finance ministers of vulnerable nations recently committed to introducing carbon-pricing mechanisms across 43 markets within ten years.

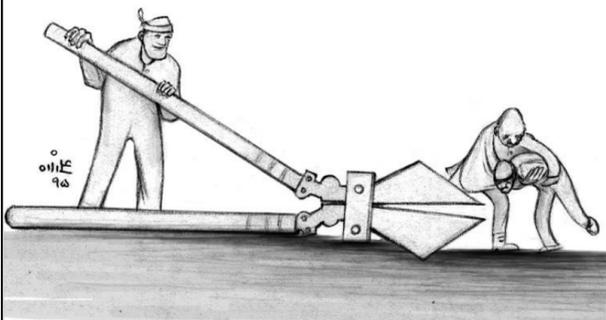
We have also pledged to improve financial accounting, so that the costs of climate change and the benefits of climate action are incorporated into economic policymaking. Costa Rica has just approved a law promoting electric trains, and legislators are debating a bill to provide incentives for electric vehicles and buses.

Such initiatives are more commonly associated with advanced economies than with developing countries.

And the rich world does have a moral obligation to move first and faster – with policies, technologies, and finance – to reduce the emissions that cause global warming. But we also recognize that developing countries have a responsibility to act and that doing so can generate immense economic, social, and public health advantages for their citizens.

We cannot succeed on our own; this much is certain. The Climate Vulnerable Forum represents a tiny share of global emissions. We need the industrialized countries and the giants of the developing world to redouble their efforts to reduce their emissions, so that global warming can be limited to 1.5 degrees. Only then can disaster be averted. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Loren Legarda is a member of the Senate of the Philippines. Marcela Guerrero is a Congresswoman from Costa Rica.



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