

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



May 28, 2016

## Forming True Democracy

Democracy is considered to be the best form of government, but it is also the most difficult to attain. History shows that though democratic system of government was formed in many countries, it failed in several of them and ultimately turned into something close to dictatorship. Therefore, it is important to comprehend that there are certain conditions that must be achieved and maintained by the societies to acquire true democracy. Enlightened citizens are the most important prerequisite for democracy. In fact, democracy and enlightened citizenship go together. In democracy, the citizens must be alert and enlightened or properly educated. They should be motivated and aware enough to participate actively in public affairs. They should stand firm for their rights and resist any infringement on their freedom. Simultaneously, they should pursue their duties honestly. They should consider their selfish interests secondary to national or collective interests. They must be helpful, unselfish and nationalistic.

Closely linked to active citizenship is the character and capability of the common masses. It is basically the character, attitudes and behavior of the common men that take democracy towards a success or a failure. In democracy, common men must be sufficiently interested in public affairs and must comprehend them. They must not be won over by emotions. Then again, their opinion, to a certain extent, should be based on sound practical ruling, broad-mindedness and unselfish devotion to public welfare. They should actively participate in the affairs of the government of his country. A democratic government is well-maintained through active criticism. Therefore, every citizen must be ready to protest and criticize the injustice and tyranny of the government, for democracy thrives when the people are eloquent; it breathes its last when they are dumb and voiceless. Furthermore, the people should be ready to fulfil their functions in minor spheres of life with eagerness, honesty and skill. Every man should be keenly interested in the welfare and happiness of his fellow-men and ready to help overcome the difficulties. In other words, civic sense is a necessary condition for the success of democracy.

It has been justly believed that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance. A democratic society demands much from its citizens. The people should be alert, vigilant and active in order to preserve their democratic institutions and enjoy their rights and liberty. When the people are indifferent, inactive and indolent in public matters, crafty politicians, clever demagogues, rich plutocrats and such other enterprising persons capture political power and abuse it for their selfish ends.

Along with vigilance and intelligence, democracy needs a spirit of tolerance and a sense of responsibility among all its citizens. Tolerance and the spirit of give and take are essential for democracy. Democracy is necessarily a rule of the majority. But if the minority party or parties are irreconcilably opposed to the laws and policy laid down by the ruling majority, democracy would fail to work; hence the need for tolerance or a spirit of give and take. It relies on the methods of peaceful persuasion. It presumes an agreement on fundamentals acceptable to all citizens, whether they belong to the majority or minority parties. They may agree to disagree but not to disunite. Democracy is in daily practice the acceptance by the minority of the majority rule.

Education is indeed the first requisite for the success of democracy. Education is necessary to make common citizens good, intelligent, honest, active, responsible, public-spirited, tolerant and vigilant of their rights and duties. Education, at least, up to secondary level should be free, universal and compulsory and should be such as to equip the citizens for the performance of their civic duties and responsibilities. Democracies demand not only the passive consent of the citizen but also his active and constant participation and cooperation which should be the end of a democratic educational system. It must make him thoughtful, intelligent and critical person who would be bold enough to criticize the government, tolerant of the views of his opponents and honest enough not to abuse public office for selfish ends.

Democracy requires organization and leadership. Indeed, the problem of organization and leadership is more urgent for democracy than for other forms of government; firstly, because modern democracies are vast and complex societies, and, secondly because democracy is inherently a government by and for common men and women. Ordinarily, common citizens are neither adequately educated nor sufficiently interested in public affairs and problems. They also do not have enough time or leisure to devote themselves to public matters. Hence the need is to inform and educate them, to arouse their interest and to organize them for public action. This important task is performed by political leadership. In order to fulfil this task, the leaders must themselves be honest, intelligent and public-spirited. They must be men of initiative, imagination and courage who can see and foresee the needs of the people and problems of their country. Moreover, they must dwell among the people in order to understand their needs and difficulties. They must also be self-reliant, honest and responsible persons.

Keeping in consideration the above requisites, Afghan authorities and people must work for democracy in the country as without acquiring them, it would be really impossible to attain true democracy or even to dream about it.

## Challenges Ahead of Democracy

By Hujjatullah Zia

Exercising one's rights and freedom is highly essential in a democratic country. People's natural and inviolable rights and dignity have to be protected on the basis of law regardless of their racial, sexual or religious backgrounds. Neither liberal practices should encounter barriers from the ideologues side nor religious values are to be disrespected. Narrowing the air for freedoms, mainly freedoms of thoughts and expressions, and sacrificing the rights of the public for self-interests will undermine democracy in a country and pave the way for social and political instability.

It is believed that in a democratic country, the constitution is approved by people's representatives, fair and free presidential and provincial elections are held on the basis of the same constitution, parliament, which is deemed "the beating heart of democracy", is established and the public rights to life, liberty and estate are considered equal in the eye of law. Moreover, power-sharing, which prevents from centralizing power in a single body, by legislative, executive and judiciary branches are very integral in a democratic state. Law should ensure the rights of the public and executive power is to enforce the law strictly.

The nascent democracy faces many barriers in Afghanistan in one way or another. Besides being threatened by warring parties, the process of democratization is also hampered by the state. Enforcement of law is very poor in the country and sometimes influential individuals violate the law with impunity. As a result, a national survey released that the Constitution was widely violated by the state. For instance, months have passed from the legal period of Parliamentary election; however, there is no preparation for election - which is in direct conflict with Constitution. Similarly, the cabinet has not been completed and the ministry of defense, alike some other significant posts, is controlled by acting head.

On the other hand, warring parties pose the bulk of threat to democracy across the country. The recent escalation in militancy and emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) group, which increased civilian casualties, challenge the democratization process to a high extent. People fell victim on the basis of their race, color, creed, etc. and many were scapegoat by the militants as means of pressurizing the government. The militants continue their terrorist attacks and violate the rights of the public without an iota of mercy. They neither recognize the Constitution nor respect the ethical code and social norms being practiced in public.

To strengthen democracy, the government sought for more than a decade to bring warring parties, mainly the Taliban outfit,

to negotiating table. The High Peace Council (HPC) was established in 2010 and tasked to get the militants to lay their arms and join peace process. A number of the Taliban prisoners were released during Hamid Karzai's administration as peace offering. But none gave the desired result and all doors were closed. The militants have now escalated their insurgency and undermine democracy through their acts of horror and terror.

Our nation is prone to militancy and as if our soil is infertile for establishing democracy. People's freedoms are curtailed, their rights and dignity are trampled upon and their blood is spilt despite their active participation in election. In other words, citizens' rights are not protected in the way as declared in the constitution and the state failed to carry out its responsibility. Vis-à-vis enforcing law, the legislative and executive powers do not move parallel to each other. For instance, our law is approved on the basis of religious code and international law, which is agreed upon by the public, however, it is not enforced properly - this will be a major blow to democracy. Although election symbolizes democracy, it is just one of the elements provided on being held free and fair. So, democracy has many elements, as mentioned above, and each is essential in forming a democratic society - void of violence, cruelty and discrimination.

To form a violent-free society, extending religious tolerance plays a key role, especially in countries where religious extremists are involved in instability and stoke tension on the grounds of people's creed and beliefs. Sine man is born with a set of natural and inalienable rights, he is free to exercise his rights and no one can restrict them but on the basis of law. Therefore, those who infringe on people's rights and liberty under the name of religion or beliefs must be brought to justice. Hence, conducting desert court, lynching one on the street for breaking a moral norm, spilling the individuals' blood, discriminating against women or an ethnic minority group, etc. put barriers ahead of democratization process in the country.

Based on theory of "social contract", people have submitted all authority to government in return for having their rights and dignity protected. They agree on being ruled and having restriction on their rights and freedom under the government's power and to be prosecuted in case of breaking law, but safeguarding the rights of the public is the state's main responsibility. So, the government will have to provide a safe ground for citizens so that they can exercise their human rights with dignity. To strengthen the burgeoning democracy, the state should hold an eagle eye on enforcing law not only outside but also inside the government's machinery.

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## Nature's Answer to Climate Risk

By Maria Damanaki

Nearly half the world's population - some 3.5 billion people - lives near coasts. As climate change exacerbates the effects of storms, flooding, and erosion, the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of those people will be at risk. In fact, the latest edition of the World Economic Forum's World Risk Assessment Report names failure to adapt to the effects of climate change as the single greatest risk, in terms of impact, to societies and economies around the world. Beyond endangering lives, more frequent and stronger storms could cost many billions of dollars, owing to infrastructure damage and lost revenues from farming, fisheries, and tourism. And, as the Harvard Business Review recently noted, the projected cost rises with each new study. Yet the international community currently spends on risk mitigation less than one-fifth of what it spends on natural-disaster response.

When it comes to climate risk, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. As Rebecca Scheurer, Director of the Red Cross Global Disaster Preparedness Center, put it, "We spend millions of dollars on the response side, and were we to invest more of those resources on the front end we'd save more people. It's as simple as that."

With the human and the financial costs of climate change attracting more attention than ever, now is the time to shift resources toward risk reduction. Doing so will require national governments, industry, aid organizations, and other NGOs to make the most of their investments. And some of the most effective and cost-effective solutions are already available in nature.

Coastal and marine ecosystems have considerable potential to mitigate the effects of storms and other risks, especially when combined with traditional built infrastructure. A 100-meter belt of mangroves, for example, can reduce wave height by up to 66% and lower peak water levels during floods. A healthy coral reef can reduce wave force by 97%, lessening the impact of storms and preventing erosion. These and other coastal ecosystems are the first line of defense for many cities around the world, from Miami to Manila.

Until recently, such nature-based solutions were too often overlooked. But leaders increasingly recognize their importance, and are beginning to take action, including on the international level. The Paris climate agreement, reached last December and signed last month, not only established a consensus on the importance of addressing climate change, but also explicitly affirmed that ecosystems play a role in capturing greenhouse gases and helping communities adapt to the effects of climate change.

At the national level, some of the most at-risk island countries are taking important steps. For example, last year, the Seychelles announced a first-of-its-kind "debt for nature" swap with its Paris Club creditors and The Nature Conservancy. The

swap will allow the country to redirect \$21.6 million of its debt toward investment in a comprehensive approach to ocean conservation that will bolster its resilience to climate change.

Private-sector leaders, too, are starting to look toward natural tools. Engineering firms like CH2M are working with coastal communities in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond to find hybrid solutions that combine traditional and nature-based approaches.

Even the insurance industry - comprising what may be the most risk-averse companies in the world - sees the potential in natural solutions. Over the last decade, insurers have paid out some \$300 billion for climate-related damage, often to rebuild the same vulnerable structures. It is not surprising, then, that the reinsurer Swiss Re has conducted studies on mitigating the costly risks of hurricanes to coastal communities.

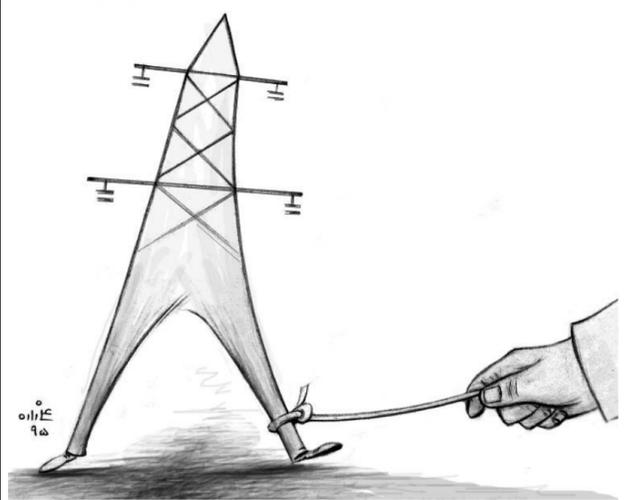
According to one Swiss Re study, Barbados loses the equivalent of 4% of its GDP every year to hurricane-related costs. But every dollar spent to protect mangroves and coral reefs saved \$20 in future hurricane losses. Given such findings, it is no longer inconceivable that insurance companies might one day write coverage for wetlands and other natural infrastructure that offers protection for coastal communities and economies.

Nature can also help to protect livelihoods. A Red Cross-led mangrove restoration project in Vietnam not only reduced damage to dykes and other built infrastructure, but also resulted in higher aquaculture yields and thus more income for the local communities. A mangrove and coral restoration project in Grenada - a joint effort of the Red Cross, the Nature Conservancy, and the fishers of Grenada's Grenville community - has also shown great potential to increase resilience. Just 30 meters of reef and coral have been shown to increase substantially the population of lobster, conch, octopus, and urchins.

Climate and disaster resilience is a challenge that spans across sectors. So too must our solutions. Such collaborative efforts are vital to the development and implementation of more effective preventive strategies. The World Bank, the Nature Conservancy, and partner researchers (including ecologists, economists, and engineers) have recently published a report offering guidelines for such cooperation. Specifically, the report recommends calculating the value of coastal ecosystems in terms of protected capital and infrastructure, based on approaches commonly used by the insurance and engineering industries.

In the face of rising climate and disaster risk, investments in nature-based solutions can protect lives and safeguard prosperity in a cost-effective manner - all while preserving imperiled natural ecosystems around the world. It is time for governments, business, and NGOs alike to recognize that when it comes to fighting the effects of climate change and protecting coastal communities, preserving and restoring nature may be the smartest investment we can make. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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