

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



November 17, 2016

Preserving Water Reservoirs

Our world has been blessed with different resources that support us to live our lives with ease and comfort. Among these resources water is one of the most basic one. Enough water to drink and to use is really necessary for human beings to live alive and it is also important for animals as well. In fact, most of the life cycle on earth depends on water.

Though a large portion of earth is filled with water yet there are concerns that it would prove to be insufficient with the passage of time and the usage. And there is also another important fact which is really very much unfortunate; and the fact is that though there are large reservoirs of water on earth there is a considerable population in the world that does not have clean water to drink and enough water to use.

It would be impossible for human beings to live without water; therefore, they require to use it wisely and at the same time find out new ways of providing it to all human beings so that everyone can benefit from it in the best possible manner. They have to make sure that the economic and political systems must ensure providence of natural resources to all the human beings alike - unfortunately that is not the case in contemporary world of ours. The short-comings in our administrative system have made the basic requirements seem lesser and inadequate though it is yet to face a serious threat of inadequacy.

It would be better for the world that it must cogitate seriously about every possibility of a new political economy so as to enable the world to compensate for the water and other shortages for the poor countries will have to suffer to a considerable extent as a result of the shortage of basic requirements and sources of energy. Unfortunately, Afghanistan is one of the same countries and it will have to face serious challenges in the times to come to provide clean drinking water to its people. Decades of war in Afghanistan has affected the country to a large extent. Different sectors have been influenced by this menace. The basic infra-structure has not been able to get proper attention and people are suffering because of basic needs, among which food and water are the most basic ones.

Even the capital Kabul has been suffering because of the lack of these basic requirements. A report last year showed that underground water level would deplete considerably in Kabul till 2017 and the residents of the city would face serious challenges in this regard. The other parts of the country are no better but there are no data available about them and many issues that they face remain unreported. It is important that those areas should also receive attention from the relevant authorities. It is also encouraging to find certain institutions and authorities feeling their responsibilities in this regard.

In an appreciative step, the foundation stone of a drinking water supply project worth 65 million Afghanis was laid in Pul-i-Alam, the capital of central Logar province by the Governor Mohammad Halim Fidai who told to the ceremony that the project would be completed in one year with funds from the Ministry of Urban Development. The project would cost 65 million Afghanis and would supply drinking water to 3,000 families. It would include digging three deep wells, installing a heavy generator, two water pumps and a tank to hold 12,000 square meters water.

It is imperative that such projects must be initiated in other parts, particularly, the remote parts of the country. And, along with such projects, a comprehensive strategy to preserve the waters in the country should also be designed and pursued. Without a long-term strategy it would be difficult to guarantee clean drinking water for the coming generations.

The relevant ministry has already warned that ground water could become undrinkable over next three years if unplanned constructions continued, and the ministry had planned to initiate short and long term projects aimed at protecting the available ground water resources from contamination. The shortage of basic requirements itself is a sure problem, but there are many other problems that are directly linked with the hunger and deprivation that result from such shortages. Many diseases would erupt and many social evils will find their way in the society and will further deteriorate the country's socio-political scenario.

It is really important that a decade of struggle for betterment in Afghanistan must not only end in peace and tranquility but also better living standard for the common Afghan people; and if that is not convenient, they must at least be provided the rudimentary requirements like clean drinking water, and the authorities need to promise that there would be serious efforts to provide all the people of Afghanistan with clean drinking water.



From Bad to Worse!

By Hujjatullah Zia

Terrorism is a great barrier before the nascent democracy in Afghanistan. With the fall of the Taliban's regime, democracy was established with the endorsement of Constitution, which includes all the fundamental rights and freedoms of the public. The human rights' discourse and presidential elections were significant landmarks in our history. Women's key role in social, cultural and political activities revealed Afghanistan's high step towards democracy.

The hegemony of democracy put major impact on public life in one way or another. Heaving a sigh of relief, Afghans embraced democracy with open arms and dreamt of a civil society, where no one's rights and liberty are violated. The downfall of the Taliban's regime was believed to put an end to war and violence and the blood of Afghan nation would not be spilt by the terrorist groups. Afghan men and women celebrated democracy before the ballot boxes with the hope of saving their lives from the bullet of warring parties, who show no mercy to civilians. Suffering under the cruel regime of the Taliban, Afghan women waxed romantic about freedom and democracy.

By and large, the last constitution of Afghanistan was approved by people's elected representatives in Loya Jirga (National Grand Assembly) held on January 3, 2004 in Kabul. This Constitution includes the inherent and inalienable rights, liberty and dignity of the individuals irrespective of their race, creed, color and sex and upholds international charters and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This constitution, which is based on national values and international standards, states, "Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity."

The US-led NATO "war on terror" believed to root out terrorism from Afghanistan's soil and strengthen the inchoate democracy. The Taliban's guerilla fighters, that were a product of social, cultural and political rift, were, however, reorganized and involved in insurgency in Afghanistan - it was a serious challenge before counter-insurgency and put the "war on terror" into the stalemate. Moreover, the US soldiers' withdrawal compounded the problem and weakened the iron will of US. Therefore, efforts were made to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

The negotiation of peace was a highly complicated and challenging issue for Afghanistan, which is yet to bear fruit, despite the tireless struggles and great sacrifices made by the High Peace Council (HPC). The Taliban never revealed a genuine tendency towards a bona fide peace in the country and played a foul game in this regard. The death of Mullah Omar and his successor Mullah Akhtar Mansour was a blow to the peace talk and brought it to a standstill.

Currently, Mansour's successor Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada play more destructive role through orchestrating attacks against the National Unity Government (NUG). In other words, democracy, in Afghanistan, is threatened by the rise of religious extremism and violence by anti-government groups that are transnational in character. The state is unable or unwilling to protect people against such extremist groups. These trends negate the spirit of democracy. Several African states collapsed or became dysfunctional due to internal conflict and violence.

Democracy is viewed as a process rather than an end product. It is wrong to assume that anything less than the ideal democracy means that there is no democracy at all. It is a process and you strengthen it and improve its quality as you implement it and make mid-course correction in it. Therefore, what matters most is its direction. Democracy needs to move from "less" to "more" democracy. It is a continuous process and requires regular review of its performance.

Democracy is a challenging political system that calls for implementation of its principles in letter and spirit. It is more responsive to the aspirations of the common people. There are ample examples in history to show that the popularity of democracy does not mean that the elected ruler will be equally popular or those criticizing such a ruler are against democracy.

Sadly, democracy has not yet given the desired result in Afghanistan since there are cultural, social and political barriers before it. Afghanistan, along with Pakistan and Syria is, reportedly, among the top five countries most hit by terrorism. According to the report, deaths from terrorism in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries increased by 650 per cent last year despite a marked fall globally as Islamic State (IS) and Boko Haram militants suffered military defeats at home but committed more attacks abroad. The report said 21 of the 34 OECD member countries had witnessed at least one attack with most deaths occurring in Turkey and France where coordinated attacks by IS gunmen and suicide bombers at the Bataclan music venue, a soccer stadium and several cafes in Paris last November killed 130 people.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria, which accounted for 72 per cent of all deaths, were the top five ranked countries in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI).

Perhaps, to strengthen democracy and save from violence and bloodshed, President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani on Monday asked the United Nations Security Council to include names of all terrorists, including the current Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah, in its sanctions list. However, the question is that will it ensure democracy in Afghanistan?

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An Economic Ultimatum for the Arab World

By Marwan Muasher

If Middle Eastern countries do not start making real progress on fundamental political and economic reforms, further regional turmoil is inevitable. With the rentier systems that governments have maintained for decades now at a breaking point, policymakers must begin the difficult, but not impossible, process of establishing new social contracts. That contract in Arab countries started to erode at the turn of the century, when governments with inflated budgets and bloated bureaucracies could no longer provide an adequate supply of basic services such as health care and education, create a sufficient number of jobs, or sustain food and fuel subsidies. But, despite diminished state benefits, most leaders have continued to insist that their countries' people uphold their end of the contract by not participating meaningfully in public life.

Arab governments were able to sustain inefficient economies for decades because they were propped up by oil revenues. In recent decades, most Arab countries have benefited in some way from the Middle East's abundant oil and gas reserves. Hydrocarbon-producing countries used their profits to buy their citizens' loyalty and establish what were effectively welfare states; and non-oil producers enjoyed the benefits of aid, capital inflows, and remittances sent back by their nationals working in resource-rich countries.

Because the governments of oil-producing countries used revenues to provide for most of their people's needs - including jobs, services, and favors - these governments fostered a culture of dependency, rather than encouraging self-reliance and entrepreneurship to expand the private sector. What's more, because they did not need to tax their citizens to generate revenues, people had little recourse to challenge authoritarianism. The political culture reflected a simple principle: "no taxation, no representation."

Now that oil prices are declining and will likely continue to remain low for several years, if not permanently, the Middle East's rentier systems face a significant challenge. Saudi Arabia, for example, is raising taxes, cutting domestic subsidies, and shifting its foreign-aid paradigm away from grants and toward investments.

The kingdom has long provided financial support to Egypt, Jordan, and other countries in the region, so this shift will put pressure on those governments to pursue private-sector growth to improve their own countries' economic performance. But, while the Arab world's governments have reached the limits of their ability to employ more people,

raise public debt, and attract outside grants, members of these countries' political and economic elite, whom the current rentier system privileges, will likely resist efforts at substantive reform. And we should expect to see further opposition from state bureaucracies, which lack any vision for a transition to an inclusive and sustainable economic model. Still, Middle Eastern countries cannot hope to develop prosperous economies without such a transition.

After relying on resource rents for decades, these governments must switch not only to new growth models, but also to more representative governance. When Arab societies are asked to accept reduced subsidies, fewer government jobs, and less from the state in general, they will demand a larger share in the decision-making process.

As it stands, the Arab world is stuck between an unsustainable economic and political status quo and the inclusive, merit-based economic system that less myopic people in the region know must replace it. Too many Arab governments have put themselves in this untenable situation, having given little consideration to building the governance institutions their states need.

The first wave of Arab uprisings, which began in December 2010 and led to the 2011 Arab Spring, was a response to the breakdown of the old social contracts. In today's perfect storm of declining oil prices and closed political systems, a new wave of protest could well emerge, particularly where governments have not recognized that the end of rentierism marks the end of the old social contract.

For these governments, economic reform is now a matter of survival. In a more open system, Arab governments will need to privatize many state-controlled companies, and make it far easier for entrepreneurs to register start-ups and launch new businesses. And, ultimately, Arab states' economic reforms will succeed only if citizens gain a more powerful voice in governance.

Tunisia is the one country where a new social contract has begun to replace rentierism. The rest of the Arab world faces two alternatives. Its leaders can begin fighting the cancer of an unsustainable status quo, with all the pain and uncertainty that such a struggle entails; or they can wait for the cancer to become a terminal condition, and be devoured by it. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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