

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



October 18, 2017

“Government Must Renew Focus to Ensure Girls Education”

Though there have been many claims of improvement, the education of the girls still faces serious problems in Afghanistan. In a report released on Tuesday, October 17, Human Rights Watch (HRW) revealed that even sixteen years after the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan ousted the Taliban, an estimated two-thirds of Afghan girls do not attend school.

The women rights director at HRW, Liesl Gerntholtz, said in a statement, “The Afghan government and donors made bold promises in 2001 to get all girls into education, but insecurity, poverty, and displacement are now driving many girls out of school...”

The government needs a renewed focus to ensure all girls have a school to attend or risk these gains being lost.” In short, the attitude of the society and the policies of the government have remained discriminatory as far as the education of girls are concerned, which will have long-lasting influence on the development of the society as a whole.

The report also highlighted the bitter facts that in half of the country’s provinces, fewer than 20 percent of teachers are female – a major barrier for the many girls whose families will not accept their being taught by a man, especially as they become adolescents.

Moreover, based on the report, many children live too far from a school to attend, which particularly affects girls. About 41 percent of schools have no buildings, and many lack boundary walls, water, and toilets – disproportionately affecting girls. On the other hand, girls are often kept home due to discriminatory attitudes that do not value or permit their education. A third of girls marry before 18, and once engaged or married, many girls are compelled to drop out of school.

It is a fact that the incidents violating women rights in Afghanistan have not been stopped though there have been comparative developments made in the last decade or so and billions of dollars spent. In fact, the changes are prevalent only on the exterior while from within the Afghan society still lacks the modernity and development it needs in order to reach to a respectable position. The support and assistance of the international community has only been able to provide clean and beautiful attire not a praiseworthy soul to Afghan society and this attire is going to get dirty very soon.

The Afghan social structure has been vehemently dominated by religious extremism and tribal nepotism.

Though these factors have affected almost everyone, women have been intensely influenced as they belong to the weaker strata of the society. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Unfortunately, these norms and doctrines have even gone to the extent of violence and have tortured women physically – mostly in the public.

They, in the name of dignity of women, have in fact degraded them. Every now and then there are some incidents that show the sick attitude of the society towards them. The girls who intend to get education are discouraged in every possible way. They have been attacked with acid, have been poisoned in mysterious ways, and even their entire schools have been bombed. In such circumstances, it is very difficult to expect that the girls’ education can be promoted easily.

In accordance to parochial tribal norms and extremist religious beliefs, women are not meant to get education. Their duties are bound to be inside the boundaries of their houses, which they do not have the right to leave in any condition except after the permission of an authoritative male member. Though there have been some improvements made to counter the traditional beliefs regarding the female education, they are mostly limited to only a couple of large cities, while most of the small cities and villages do not have proper or any arrangement for the education of women.

Moreover, the efforts that are carried out in some way or the other are not without opposition – most of the times the opposition comes in the form of ruthless violence even by the authorities that should guard and protect them. Therefore, the parents, who are interested to let their girls get education, have to think thousand times because for them the lives of their children are dearer than their education.

There have been incidents that attempt to teach the people not to promote the education of the girls. However, it should be mentioned here that this sort of incidents is really very cowardly and it depicts that the culprits are not capable of attracting others towards their bogus ideas so they take the support of violence on weaker strata of society.

In fact, it is not just the education of the girls that has been influenced much by the extremist and backward thinking in Afghan society; rather the whole education system has been going through difficulties.

Continuous wars for decades have left Afghan society suffer in so many fields and areas and education is also one of them.



The 19th National Congress of China

By Hujjatullah Zia

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which starts on Wednesday, offers a chance to review achievements under the leadership of Chinese President, also the Party’s General Secretary, Xi Jinping. At the congress, Xi is expected to deliver a report on the committee’s work in the past five years and to present the future direction of the Party and state.

The 19th CPC National Congress, which will be convened on October 18, is going to review the Party’s work over the past five years and summarize precious experiences that the Party has gained from the historical process of uniting and leading people of all ethnic groups to carry on and advance socialism with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of Xi Jinping. To review the past five years, remarkable progress were made in deepening reforms, enhancing the rule of law, improving the environment, and building a strong army. The fight against corruption has also gained crushing momentum.

As the leader of the Party, Chinese military and nation, Xi has made a series of practical and historically significant achievements in advancing reform and development, internal affairs and China’s diplomacy, as well as in governance. Therefore, his nation strongly supported the Party, which won high praise from the international community, too. Backed by Xi’s new thoughts and ideas on governance, the CPC has carried out substantial strategies for solving insurmountable challenges, and gaining great achievements. The Party took high step in the process of rejuvenation, since the 18th National Congress, and provided a “Chinese plan” for the common problems developing countries face in the process of modernization.

In terms of mitigating unemployment, Ning Jizhe, head of Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said that China’s nationwide survey-based unemployment rate stood at 4.83 percent in Sept, the lowest since 2012. It is said that some 9.74 million new jobs were created in China’s urban regions from January to August, which means China has already fulfilled 88.5 percent of its official goal to create 11 million new jobs in 2017. “The per capita income doubled in the past five years and villagers feel much happier,” Fu Huating, party chief of the Xingshisi village, Gannan County is cited as saying. “We will roll up our sleeves and work harder, staunchly following the Party.” In short, China has seen over 55 million reach a reasonable standard of living within the past five years. Through “economic policy” China

has also forged a relationship with the rest of the world on the basis of interests. This diplomacy transcends differences in social and political, and ideological systems. Similarly, anti-corruption campaign has swept across Chinese community, putting at least 240 senior officials under investigation.

Xi said that once China had a moderately prosperous society, by 2020, the Party and people of various ethnic groups across his country would be motivated to build a modernized socialist country by 2049, the centenary of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

In terms of foreign policy, China’s independent foreign policy of peace has boosted its soft power. At the current historical point, China will further its integration into the rest of the world and receive more worldwide attention. Soft power is exerting a more profound and direct influence on China’s peaceful development. To put it succinctly, Chinese state is bound to value the enhancement of soft power at the strategic level. China is also concerned about the issue of terrorism and instability in Afghanistan. Beijing formally initiated a mediation bid to ease Afghan-Pak tensions and encourage the two neighbors to jointly work for combating terrorism and promoting regional peace. In June, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi traveled to Kabul where he met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and other senior officials to discuss ways to improve ties with Pakistan. He also traveled to Islamabad for furthering his mediation mission. Recently, Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) – comprising of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States – was revived and held a meeting in Muscat, Oman’s capital, on Monday to discuss Afghan peace process. Hence, China does its best to broker peace talks between Afghan government and the Taliban and build trust between Kabul and Islamabad.

To sum up, China, besides gaining achievements at national level, struggles with bona fide intention in terms of regional peace, stability, and sustainable development. Its “smile diplomacy” will bear the desired result. The 19th Congress, which is highly important, will draw out guideline and policies to respond to the call of time and reform the Party’s constitution accordingly. The congress will also boost confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, continue to adopt an overall approach to promote economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress.

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Intellectual Property for the Twenty-First-Century Economy

By Joseph E. Stiglitz, Dean Baker, and Arjun Jayadev

When the South African government attempted to amend its laws in 1997 to avail itself of affordable generic medicines for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, the full legal might of the global pharmaceutical industry bore down on the country, delaying implementation and extracting a high human cost. South Africa eventually won its case, but the government learned its lesson: it did not try again to put its citizens’ health and wellbeing into its own hands by challenging the conventional global intellectual property (IP) regime. Until now. The South African cabinet is preparing to finalize an IP policy that promises to expand access to medicines substantially. South Africa will now undoubtedly face all manner of bilateral and multilateral pressure from wealthy countries. But the government is right, and other developing and emerging economies should follow in its footsteps.

Over the last two decades, there has been serious pushback from the developing world against the current IP regime. In large part, this is because wealthy countries have sought to impose a one-size-fits-all model on the world, by influencing the rulemaking process at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and forcing their will via trade agreements. The IP standards advanced countries favor typically are designed not to maximize innovation and scientific progress, but to maximize the profits of big pharmaceutical companies and others able to sway trade negotiations. No surprise, then, that large developing countries with substantial industrial bases – such as South Africa, India, and Brazil – are leading the counterattack.

These countries are mainly taking aim at the most visible manifestation of IP injustice: the accessibility of essential medicines. In India, a 2005 amendment created a unique mechanism to restore balance and fairness to patenting standards, thereby safeguarding access. Overcoming several challenges in domestic and international proceedings, the law has been found to comply with WTO standards. In Brazil, early action by the government to treat people with HIV/AIDS resulted in several successful negotiations, lowering drug prices considerably. These countries are fully justified in opposing an IP regime that is neither equitable nor efficient. In a new paper, we review the arguments about the role of intellectual property in the process of development. We show that the preponderance of theoretical and empirical evidence indicates that the economic institutions and laws protecting knowledge in today’s advanced economies are increasingly inadequate to govern global economic activity, and are poorly suited to meet the needs of developing countries and emerging markets. Indeed, they are inimical to providing for basic human needs such as adequate health care. The central problem is that knowledge is a (global) public good, both in the technical sense that the marginal cost of someone using it is zero, and in the more general sense that an increase in knowledge can improve wellbeing globally. Given this, the worry has been that the market will undersupply knowledge, and research will not be adequately incentivized. Throughout the late twentieth century, the conventional wisdom was that this market failure could best be rectified by introducing another one: private monopolies, created through stringent patents strictly enforced. But private IP protection is just one route to solving the problem of encouraging and financing research, and it has been more problematic than had been anticipated, even for advanced countries.

An increasingly dense “patent thicket” in a world of products requiring thousands of patents has sometimes stifled innovation, with more spent on lawyers than on researchers in some cases. And research often is directed not at producing new products but at extending, broadening, and leveraging the monopoly power granted through the patent. The US Supreme Court’s 2013 decision that naturally occurring genes cannot be patented has provided a test of whether pat-

ents stimulate research and innovation, as advocates claim, or impede it, by restricting access to knowledge. The results are unambiguous: innovation has been accelerated, leading to better diagnostic tests (for the presence of, say, the BRCA genes related to breast cancer) at much lower costs. There are at least three alternatives for financing and incentivizing research. One is to rely on centralized mechanisms of direct support for research, such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation in the United States. Another is to decentralize direct funding through, say, tax credits. Or a governmental body, private foundation, or research institution can award prizes for successful innovations (or other creative activity). The patent system can be thought of as awarding a prize. But the prize impedes the flow of knowledge, reduces the benefits derived from it, and distorts the economy. By contrast, the final alternative to this system maximizes the flow of knowledge, by maintaining a creative commons, exemplified by open-source software.

Developing economies should use all of these approaches to promote learning and innovation. After all, economists have recognized for decades that the most important determinant of growth – and thus of gains in human development and welfare – is technological change and the knowledge it embodies. What separates developing countries from developed countries is as much a gap in knowledge as a gap in resources. To maximize global social welfare, policymakers should strongly encourage the diffusion of knowledge from developed to developing countries.

But while the theoretical case for a more open system is robust, the world has been moving in the opposite direction. Over the last 30 years, the prevailing IP regime has erected more barriers to the use of knowledge, often causing the gap between the social returns to innovation and the private returns to widen. The powerful advanced-economy lobbies that have shaped that regime clearly put the latter first, reflected in their opposition to provisions recognizing intellectual property rights associated with traditional knowledge or biodiversity. The widespread adoption of today’s stringent IP protection is also historically unprecedented. Even among the early industrializers, IP protection came very late and often was deliberately eschewed to enable for quicker industrialization and growth.

The current IP regime is not sustainable. The twenty-first-century global economy will differ from that of the twentieth in at least two critical ways. First, the economic weight of the economies such as South Africa, India, and Brazil will be substantially higher. Second, the “weightless economy” – the economy of ideas, knowledge, and information – will account for a growing share of output, in developed and developing economies alike.

The rules relating to the “governance” of global knowledge must change to reflect these new realities. An IP regime dictated by the advanced countries more than a quarter-century ago, in response to political pressure by a few of their sectors, makes little sense in today’s world. Maximizing profits for a few, rather than global development and welfare for the many, didn’t make much sense then, either – except in terms of the power dynamics at the time. Those dynamics are changing, and emerging economies should take the lead in creating a balanced IP system that recognizes the importance of knowledge for development, growth, and wellbeing. What matters is not only the production of knowledge, but also that it is used in ways that put people’s health and welfare ahead of corporate profits. South Africa’s potential decision to enable access to medicine may be an important milestone on the road toward that goal. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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