

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



October 19, 2016

## Troubles must Change a Nation

It is widely believed concept that the nations that go through difficult times ultimately gain a sense of admiration for peace, tranquility and progress and the members of such nation become more responsible and strive to bring about positive changes. History favors this concept evidently.

For example, it took European centuries to rise for development and reforms and ultimately become better nations of the world. They had to go through dark age and then many wars before they started realizing that wars would not lead them towards stability, therefore, they brought about important changes in their considerations and priorities.

Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that it is not the difficulties and troubles alone that would guarantee a better response by the nation; the nature of the response itself is also of great importance. If a nation faces troubles and issues and gets pessimistic, it would not rise to the occasion and rather succumb to it.

It would then be dominated by those troubles and a time could come that nation would consider all the troubles as its destiny and thus adjust itself with them. At that point all the doors towards reforms and development would be closed.

As a matter of fact there are opportunities hidden in the troubles and problems. They show that there are shortcomings that have to be overcome by the society members. They require change and thus demand appropriate actions. Looking at the troubles in that perspective could give a nation an impetus to change and improve their socio-political circumstances.

One of the most imperative characteristic of a nation is its attitude and behavior within a tense and challenging situation. The nations that are able to go through such situations successfully, in fact, deserve to be remembered by history, while the ones that lose themselves only have the right to wither away with the sands of time.

Here it is important to see the nation as a whole.

It is not always right to consider leaders responsible for everything that happens within the society. Definitely, they have a dominant role and certain responsibilities as well, but the society in its entirety depends on all the people.

Even the quality and characteristics of the leaders depend on the types of societies and the nature of people among whom they are nourished. So, the responsibility for everything does not fall on the leaders automatically; neither are they responsible to bring about all the positive changes that are required within a society.

Therefore, the nation as a whole must rise to the occasion and respond to the challenges.

Moreover, the leaders are not always perfect and there have been many cases wherein the leaders have proved that they want nothing more than their self-centered incentives. There are cases when they are corrupt and above all they are like all other human beings and they may commit mistakes, make wrong decisions and may even sacrifice the greater good for their families and friends. In such cases it becomes really important for a nation to be vigilant and must not become dumb sheep and follow them blindly.

Currently Afghan nation is also going through a very crucial phase of its history and it is demanded from the nation to be vigilant and sensible and strive to write its history itself, instead of letting the circumstances take the control and pen down their destiny.

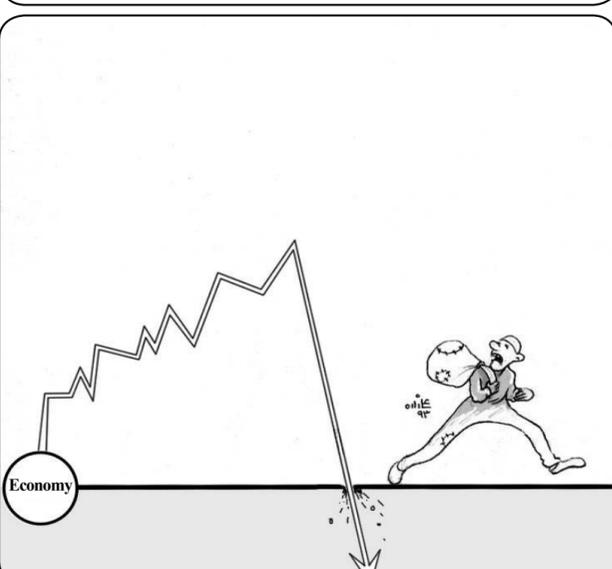
Though a government has been formed whose basic structure is based on unity and that also claims to a national unity government, concerns still remain regarding the exposed feelings and sentiments of the people for their countrymen.

It has to be accepted that even if the leaders get together and form alliances and coalitions, nothing would save the nation from going towards chaos if the people abhor each other and become the victim of chauvinist and extremist feelings.

Therefore, it is important that Afghan nation must now start thinking and acting wisely. They have experienced an ugly phase of civil war and a very long history of instability. By now, they should be sensible enough not to fall in the trap of chauvinist feelings for their fellow beings and do not give any one opportunity to utilize their feelings for their self-centered incentives.

Now, they have to realize that their responsibilities are to declare clearly that they are no more ready to be fooled and to be utilized by others. Their rights are to announce their hatred for ignorance, poverty, conservative ideas, slavish thinking and growing hypocrisy, not for each other.

They need to fight against the prevailing injustice and all the efforts that try to keep them away from education and knowledge. They should say no to the darkness and try to follow the light as it is the only way that they can live their life with prosperity and dignity.



## Low Quality Medicines

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The availability of quality pharmaceutical products is critical to promoting and maintaining public health. This is particularly important in impoverished, insecure, countries, such as Afghanistan, where there is heightened vulnerability to disease and other sources of morbidity/mortality. Unfortunately, increased demand for pharmaceutical products and significant financial incentives for engaging in illicit importation have led to a dramatic increase in the importation of poor quality medicine. According to reports, about 90% of Afghanistan's pharmaceutical products are imported while 50% of them are illegally imported. It is estimated that the combined value of both illegal and legal pharmaceuticals in Afghanistan is USD 700-880 million.

While the rules and regulations that govern pharmaceutical imports in Afghanistan need to be significantly revised, there are procedures that, if followed, could mitigate the importation of poor quality pharmaceuticals. However, as with many rules and regulations in Afghanistan, they are easily circumvented through corruption.

In other words, the entire medicine importation process is highly vulnerable to corruption, from registration of pharmaceutical companies, to pro forma registration, to laboratory-based quality control. Enormous financial incentives to engage in illicit importation of pharmaceuticals has led to an increase in smuggling, as well as the creation of an entire industry dedicated to producing and importing low quality pharmaceuticals into Afghanistan. For example, it is estimated that up to 70% of pharmaceuticals imported into Afghanistan are produced in neighboring countries, specifically for the Afghanistan market. It is widely believed that the dramatic increase in the number of pharmaceutical companies in certain neighboring countries is due to the ease with which low quality medicines can be produced and imported with relatively little oversight or quality control. Enormous profits can be made as a result, particularly since the producing companies do not even need to meet their local quality control standards as long as the pharmaceuticals are produced for export to Afghanistan only. Currently, there are around 500 foreign pharmaceutical suppliers registered with the MoPH. It is estimated that 250-300 of these companies are producing exclusively for the Afghanistan market. Many of them are not allowed to sell their products in their own market, but are allowed to export their products to Afghanistan. This raises serious concerns over Afghanistan's importation standards, even relative to the region.

However, The Pharmaceutical Law deals with selection, production, importation, distribution and consumption of pharmaceutical products in the country. But It was enacted at a time when there was significant need for pharmaceutical products in Afghanistan, which the law addressed by over-simplifying much of the importation process. Given the dramatic increase in the volume of low quality pharmaceutical imports, this law is need of substantial revision. Aside from the highly permissive environment the Pharmaceutical Law provides importers, it is deficient in addressing conflict of interest issues that are easily exploited by government staff. It is said that many MoPH staff members have direct or indi-

rect business relationships with pharmaceutical companies. The Licensed National Pharmaceutical List determines which products can be imported, produced, and distributed. The list is needed to be updated every year, but it has not been updated for many years. Nevertheless, the National Pharmaceutical Board continues to approve importation/production of additional 50-60 items per year. Interviewees stated that this is a significant corruption opportunity as MoPH staff can simply ask for bribes for anything that is not on the list.

Corruptions also play a significant role in obtaining licenses and registrations, effectively undermining a number of quality control checkpoints. Among other things, these results in the transportation of pharmaceuticals that will exceed demand/necessity, flooding Afghanistan with medicines that will likely expire, but continue to be sold. It also ensures that many of companies that have produced the drugs will not have been evaluated for the quality of their products or followed proper storage and cold chain maintenance procedures before and during transport. During the summer, pharmaceutical are often transported through areas that reach 40 centigrade, ensuring the many medications will be spoiled, but sold to consumers anyway. In addition, pharmaceutical transport to and through Afghanistan is exposed to many of the same vulnerabilities found in Afghanistan's notoriously corrupt border management system. Bribes can be used to override almost every step of the importation process, including quality control checkpoints at the border, importing pharmaceuticals beyond those listed on the pro forma sheet or even without the required pro-forma registration.

In brief, poor quality medicine and high prices in the market have created considerable challenges toward healthcare services in Afghanistan. In fact, it does not kill only the health of our people but also kills the economy of them. So, there is a serious need to limit the volume of low quality pharmaceutical products entering Afghanistan through a range of reforms to the registration and licensing process, retail price, as well as broader regulatory reforms. On the other hand, promoting technical surveillance and monitoring capacity is important to ensure that production and import companies are adequately vetted, and that pharmaceuticals entering the country are subjected to rigorous quality control. Also Afghan Government must be notified that we are signatory to numerous human rights treaties and having fundamental duty to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of its citizens. This includes a right to enjoy the "highest attainable standards of physical and mental health" as outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on Economic and Social Rights (UNCESR). The duty of Afghanistan to minimize the effect of low quality pharmaceuticals on its citizens is further clarified by General Comment 14 of the UNESCR, which highlights the right to quality health related goods and services. Given the population's heightened vulnerability to sources of mortality and morbidity, upholding these rights by minimizing the effect of corruption on the import of pharmaceuticals must be a priority for Afghanistan.

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## A Wave Election in America?

By Elizabeth Drew

With the world mesmerized by the United States' presidential race this year, the race for control of the US House of Representatives and the Senate has been largely overlooked. But the outcome of the congressional elections could make or break the next president's agenda.

For all the power a president has, the 100-member Senate determines the fate of international treaties as well as the president's nominations and legislative proposals. The 435-member House does not have as much power as the Senate, but control of the White House, the Senate, and the House by the same party could overcome much of the gridlock that has debilitated US governance in recent years.

The US does not have party-line elections, so voters can either punish a party (usually the one that has been in charge) by voting against all of its candidates; fully support a particular party; or split their tickets by voting for one party's presidential candidate and another party's congressional candidates.

Events have moved quickly since the Washington Post came upon an 11-year-old tape showing Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump bragging about his sexual aggressiveness. Not only have the Democrats' chances to retake the Senate improved; so, too, have their prospects for retaking the House.

Previously, almost no one considered the House to be in play. Trump's drop in the polls since the tape's release has changed that, and the candidate has made matters worse for his party by denying that he has groped or assaulted women - a claim that impelled numerous women to come forward and say otherwise.

Still, winning the House won't be easy for the Democrats, because congressional districts have been heavily gerrymandered, and Republicans control more of the governorships and state legislatures that oversee that process.

The Democrats must net at least 30 House seats and four Senate seats to retake control of each chamber, respectively. A net Democratic gain of four Senate seats would produce a 50-50 split, in which case, if Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton wins, her vice president, Tim Kaine, would be on hand to break tie votes.

Senate candidates who have stood apart from Trump have been faring better than those who have not. For example, Trump was ahead in Ohio before the tape's release; recent polling indicates that now he is trailing Clinton there. When the tape came out, Ohio Senator Rob Portman (along with nine other senators) rescinded his endorsement of Trump, and he still seems to have a solid hold on his seat. Nonetheless, when Trump supporters attacked Republicans who had broken with him, a few re-endorsed him.

It is widely agreed that the top of a ballot influences races further down. Though the extent to which this happens isn't clear, when it happens overwhelmingly, it is known as a "wave election," as occurred in 1980 when Ronald Reagan trounced Jimmy Carter and helped the Republicans reclaim the Senate and 34 House seats. The Republicans didn't have formal control of the House, but Reagan effectively had a working majority, because numerous Democrats from the South voted with them. While a lot may happen in the campaign's remaining three weeks, the US could be heading toward another wave election.

Certain Senate races have long been considered in the bag for the Democrats. In Wisconsin, former Senator Russ Feingold is decisively ahead of incumbent Senator Ron Johnson, after having narrowly lost to him six years ago; and in Illinois, the GOP has effectively written off gaffe-prone Republican Senator Mark Kirk.

Senate seats in New Hampshire, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere that were considered toss-ups before the tape's release have come closer to being within the Democrats' reach. Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who ran against Trump in the Republican primaries, was considered likely to win reelection; now, he's seen as vulnerable. If the US has a wave election, even Republican Senators whose seats are still considered safe, such as Arizona Senator John McCain, could be toppled.

But the Republicans could run interference against Clinton, even if they do lose in a wave. A Republican minority in the Senate can still effectively limit her agenda by using the filibuster, which requires 60 votes to end a floor debate and bring a bill to a vote. If Republicans keep control of the House, Speaker Paul Ryan, who may be eyeing the 2020 Republican presidential nomination, might try to cooperate with the president on some issues to show that he can get things done; but highly conservative House Republicans would likely rebel.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court still has only eight members, instead of the usual nine, creating the possibility of split votes on key decisions. Republicans are anxious to keep the Court's ideological complexion intact after the death of the reliably conservative Antonin Scalia in February. That is why they have been blocking Obama's more liberal nominee, Merrick Garland, since March.

So, even if the Democrats control the Senate starting in January, Republicans could still block a President Clinton's Supreme Court nominations and policy program. And, because the Democrats are unlikely to win the House, the prospect for paralysis in Washington remains. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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