

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



September 13, 2017

Accommodating Diversity

So as to exist with cooperation in an exceedingly diverse society it's necessary to develop respect and broadmindedness for others. Without these factors, it might be terribly troublesome to tighten the social bonds. The varied societies have inhabitants from totally dissimilar cultural, historical, religious, ethnic or sectarian milieus. Such societies, although have the advantage of being diverse and culturally wealthy, are noticeably at risk of conflicts, also. As there are teams of individuals with totally different ideologies and practices there are prospects that there are frequent clashes and disturbances. Therefore, it's necessary in such societies that totally different teams ought to settle for one another's existence.

The open-mindedness for others is best developed by realizing the actual fact that others have their reasons to be what they're. They need their own backgrounds and values and their own practices that have developed among them through their distinct history. However, people don't seem to be able to do so in such a large amount of cases. They, in fact, become the victims of utmost partisanship. They observe and perceive others in their own views and check out to weigh them as per their own values, that don't offer correct and just result. They base their analysis and understanding depending on their own frame of reference that is certain to be biased as they do not look after the objective truths.

The biased and ethno-centric approach towards others is certain to end in clashes and chaos. Such a state of affairs is actually noticeably prejudicious and might be used by others for their personal benefits. History approves the actual fact that the heterogeneous societies that have had clashes among their completely different strata were dominated by others who solely reinforced those clashes through political means and in that manner pursued their own motives. In short, the societies that have such clashes are politically used by others and that they suffer severe loss as a result.

It is, therefore, essential for heterogeneous societies to develop a culture of co-existence. A way of belongingness to an oversized body; may be a sense for attachment to some national feelings, will solve the problem to a particular level. Binding themselves to national levels, the heterogeneous teams within the society might surrender their trivial matters and begin thinking in broader perspective. They need to be instructed to grasp that it's solely through collective efforts that they'll improve their survival potential in today's society. Their collective efforts will grow to be a synergy that may give them the chances of facing the overgrowing challenges of life successfully and dignity.

One of the simplest ways in which to exist in an exceedingly heterogeneous society is searching for the similarities among totally different teams rather than distinguishing the variations and creating them the bone of rivalry. In fact, the similarities among totally different human teams are larger than their variations. One of the biggest similarities among all the groups of people is that they're human beings and share an equivalent earth to survive on. However, such ideas are solely thought of ideal and unworkable. In reality, people are divided into totally different strata and that they use myriads of disparities. There are fights among them and that they use deadly weapons in their fights that kill many at a time. Each cluster, in pursuit of proving itself higher or correct, makes machinations to decimate others. Others are aliens, foreigners, infidels and wrong-doers. Religions and social and political ideologies that have got to bring folks along have, in fact, compelled them to stand largely apart and divided. This can be extremely pathetic and doesn't show in the least that humans are the most superior of creatures and have the intelligence and gumption.

Afghanistan is one among the societies that are heterogeneous to a particular extent. There are folks from totally different ethnic groups who have their sub-cultures. Although they have embellished Afghan society with variety; however, there are instances when these strata have had clashes among each other. These clashes resulted in civil wars and influenced Afghan society negatively to a large extent. Other countries that had their interests in Afghan society used these clashes for their political functions and further added fuel to the fire.

However, nowadays Afghan society is standing in an exceedingly different position. It's in the course of developing a peaceful life for its folks. At this important juncture, it's extremely necessary that Afghan society should stand united and face challenges as a powerful nation. It should not let the variations among various strata to dominate their national integration. The younger generation will play an amazing role in this regard. They're educated and they have previously experienced the implications of decades of instability and wars; so, they'll better decide which path to choose. If Afghan folks ought to guarantee their national integration within the times to come, they will tested by the challenges.

They have to learn holding one another's hands tightly and assisting one another in nation building. They need to grasp that the varied groups within the country are essentially different elements of a healthy body and while not the support of any of them it might not be able to create the body complete and make it work and perform properly.

Widespread Violation of Women's Rights

By Hujjatullah Zia

Following the fall of the Taliban's regime, the rights of women changed into a hotly debated discourse in Afghanistan. Women heaved a sigh of relief and geared up for playing their role in social, political and cultural arenas. Their active part in approving Constitution in 2004 in Kabul Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) and provincial and presidential elections was undeniable. The new constitution upheld their rights through defining equal rights and freedom for men and women regardless of their gender. But this issue also triggered a sense of sensitivity for traditional and tribal figures who were not able to reconcile their mindset and religious dilemma with modern discourse.

The Taliban regime denied women's rights and freedoms claiming to protect Islamic values. This frame of mind changed into a deep-seated mentality and cultural tradition, mainly in tribal belts. That is to say, tribal areas adopted the same attitude towards women and deemed women inferior to men. They nurtured a misogynistic view and treated women harshly.

However, with the sudden political upheaval and women's active part in social and political affairs, those who considered women inferior were shocked. Indeed, modern issues challenged their traditional mindsets. They had to either reconcile their traditional mentalities with modern discourse or raise their voice against this upheaval. A number of people from tribal belts adopted the first attitude through remaining indifferent to women's rights and practiced their own religious beliefs in the four walls of their homes. However, those who lacked tolerance and were radicalized under the Taliban's code of conduct, joined the Taliban guerilla fighters calling the democratic administration a "puppet government". It was not acceptable for them that women, who were not allowed to go out without burqa (a head-to-toe covering for females) during the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, suddenly appeared in social and political arenas claiming equal rights and liberty with men. The Taliban capitalized on the sentiment of radical-oriented individuals and prompted them to resort to arm against the government and foreign troops. They terrorized women, threatened and assassinated female police and politicians, conducted desert courts, barred girls from going to schools, etc. In brief, the Taliban practices recurred in tribal areas and cultural restriction engulfed women in restive districts and Taliban-dominated areas. The third group that cherished liberal ideas sought to empower women and support their rights and freedoms in accordance with new constitution. This group embraced modernity with

all its products with open arms. Although their liberal approach towards women's rights were in conflict with cultural tradition of Afghan society and, in some cases, with religious tenets, they did not hesitate to continue.

It is worth saying that high-profile Afghan religious scholars, both from Sunni and Shiite sects, had influential role in approving the constitution approved in Kabul Loya Jirga. They also endorsed the compatibility of the constitution with the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) - both recognize equal rights and dignity for men and women. Hence, men and women are equal in the eyes of national and international laws and there should be no discrimination on the basis of gender.

Despite this fact, discriminating women on the grounds of her gender is widespread in Afghanistan and misogynic views hold strong sway in some parts of the country. According to a recent report released by Human Rights Independent Commission about human rights in Afghanistan, violating the rights of mankind, mainly women, and dignity is widespread in the country. It says that cultural restrictions barred girls from selecting spouse freely in 1395 Afghan calendar. It also recorded forced marriages, honor-killings, desert courts and terrorist attacks regarding women stating that right to life has been extremely critical and cheap. Last year, about 5575 cases of violence against Afghan women were recorded, the report says. The violence includes physical, mental, sexual, verbal, and cultural violence. In short, the graph of violence mounted from the year 1394.

Virtually, several kinds of attitudes towards women are adopted as it was mentioned above. After all, cultural restrictions remain one of the great obstacles before Afghan women. To mitigate violence against women, merely approving law will not bear the desired result. On the one hand, the government must implement the law strictly and prosecute law breakers, on the other hand, the mindsets and cultural values should be changed in our society through spreading awareness regarding women's rights from religious and legal perspectives. Indeed, gender discrimination has no room in national and international instruments, especially after the approval of UN Charter and UDHR which says that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and states in second article that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language...."

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Regulating Across the Digital Divide

By Shamel Azmeh

The increasing digitization of the global economy is changing how products and services are produced, distributed, and sold across borders. Technologies like cloud computing, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and "smart devices" are spawning new industries, and revolutionizing old ones.

But, while these changes could bring important benefits, the speed of digitization has also created daunting governance challenges, both within and across countries. Existing global rules - embedded in multilateral, regional, and bilateral trade and investment agreements - are being challenged by the new processes that digitization is enabling.

This is creating more space for national governments to intervene in the digital economy. China, for example, has established its own digital industries, using policies such as Internet filtering, data localization (requiring Internet firms to store data on domestic servers), and forced technology transfer to drive digital development. This has supported the emergence of major Chinese digital firms such as Tencent and Baidu, though it often has had adverse effects on freedom of expression and access to information.

Governments elsewhere increasingly view such digital policies as a way to catch up with advanced digital economies, like the United States. But, while some countries have managed to take advantage of the current regulatory environment to advance their own digital capabilities, many developing countries risk being left behind.

One factor is that the effectiveness of existing global rules is being eroded. The World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), for example, governs trade in services through different "modes of supply." Many developing countries agreed to liberalize cross-border delivery of services (so-called "mode one" trade), never anticipating just how dramatically the digital economy would revolutionize cross-border economic opportunities and enable more services to be delivered across borders. Today, these earlier commitments are becoming economically meaningful, increasing the pressure on many developing countries.

In recent years, debates about how to govern the digital economy have intensified. Multinational digital firms, mostly based in the US, have pushed for globally harmonized rules that would provide predictability and limit the space for national governments to intervene in digital flows.

Supporting such efforts, the Obama administration made the digital domain a core part of US trade policy. Provisions on the free flow of data, together with prohibition of data localization and forced technology transfer, were included in so-called "twenty-first-century trade agreements," like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The objective was to bring digital oversight to two major markets - the Asia-Pacific (under the TPP) and the European Union (under the TTIP) - as an important first step toward global rules in these areas.

Negotiations for digital rules under the TPP proved difficult, but ultimately were successful; the Obama administration overcame opposition by offering better market access for manufactured goods to some TPP partners.

TTIP negotiations proved more challenging, with some European states, particularly France and Germany, opposing the rules out of fear that they would enable US firms to dominate the European digital economy. "Digital catching up," as colleagues and I have noted, is a key strategic objective for many European countries.

The election of President Donald Trump in the US, who campaigned on a platform of protectionist trade rules and support for "traditional" manufacturing industries, has called into question the future of digital rulemaking. Trump's decision to withdraw from the TPP was received very negatively by the US digital industry. It remains to be seen how digital trade regulations will fare under the TTIP, which Trump has suggested he might revive.

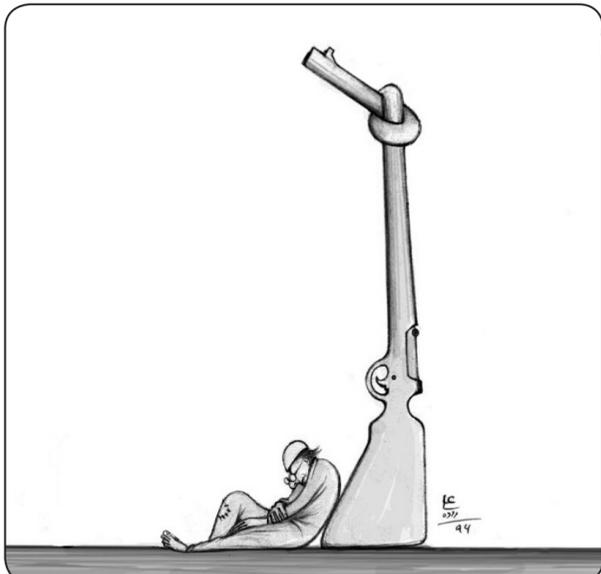
Trump's trade moves notwithstanding, efforts to update global rules governing the digital economy are continuing - within the WTO, and also as part of talks among the US, Canada, and Mexico to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. These debates will only become more urgent in the coming years.

So far, regulatory ambiguity has not severely affected developing countries, and the economic costs to the global South have been minimal. That may change, however, if the world's three major economies - the US, the EU, and China - were ever to harmonize their approach to regulating digital trade and global data flows. In such a scenario, the pressure on developing countries to accept digital rules would intensify.

Proponents of new rules could advise developing countries to accept them openly, arguing that to operate outside a global regulatory system would hurt domestic digital development and make it difficult to participate in new technological fields. But new rules could also revive the inequities wrought by the "Uruguay Round" of trade negotiations, which created the WTO and drove North-South free trade agreements.

In multilateral and bilateral agreements, developing countries accept restrictions on their "policy space" in exchange for better market access to advanced economies. Many scholars now believe this "bargain" undermines developing countries' ability to enact policies that encourage economic diversification and structural change, making it more difficult for them to catch up economically and technologically with developed economies. A new framework for digital trade and e-commerce must be crafted with these concerns in mind. As rules are created to manage how countries interact, regulators must work to ensure that digital-trade policies do not exacerbate the inequities that the traditional trading regime has exposed. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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