

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



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Insecurity Haunts Investment Initiatives

Though insecurity and lawlessness have been influencing almost all the sectors in Afghanistan, one of the most important sectors that is being influenced badly is the economic sector. Finding no opportunities for growth and threatened by consistent rise in terrorist attacks, kidnapping and corruption, the economic system in our country lacks investment initiatives and fruitful prospects. Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) in this regard has observed that investment has dropped to 40% in the country because of insecurity and particularly because of the kidnappings of businessmen.

ACCI deputy head, Khan Jan Alokzai, said in a recent statement, "Investments have decreased by 40 percent this year, this is not only linked to security issues, kidnapping has played a major role in this respect." As per the information released by ACCI on Wednesday, September 13, more than 30 cases of abduction of businessmen have been recorded; while, the problem has led to investors pulling their money out of the country. ACCI also claimed that kidnappers, in some cases, have abducted businessmen from areas close to police check points. The concerns shown by ACCI are justified and clearly point at the fact that government is not carrying out measures to control growing insecurity and protect the businessmen, which is influencing the overall economic system and pushing it further towards instability.

Stable economic systems, wherein businesses and investments flourish, guarantee stability within political system, on most of the occasions. As politics is the game of power and authority, in today's world power and authority are directly linked to wealth; while wealth is the product of an economic system. Therefore, it can be easily observed in contemporary political scenario that the states that have wealth and prosper in their economic life are dominating the international politics.

They, as a matter of fact, run and shape the world order. Whereas the countries with weaker economic systems suffer from lack of stability in their political systems and seem to have no tangible influence and authority within the international political scenario. They are mostly on the receiving end. Even their political systems and, in certain cases, their political leaders are chosen by the powerful countries of the world. It can, thus be said without any hesitation that the economic system has a compelling role within the development and stability of political systems within a state and within the international political order.

Afghanistan is one of the countries where economic instability has given birth to political instability. As there is no stable economic infrastructure, the country's democratic structure has shaky foundations. In Afghanistan insecurity has been influencing the economic life to a large extent. Both national and international businessmen are not readily willing to invest in all the sectors and they do not see positive prospects of their businesses. As insecurity has been overwhelmingly influencing the country, the development in the basic infra-structure has been meager.

The doubts and uncertainties of the Afghan market have made the international investors to think thousand times before they take an initiative to start their businesses in the country. Though there are great opportunities in Afghanistan and the country is blessed with different types of mineral and other natural resources, the economic infra-structure has not been able to get enough attention. Besides that, there are other factors as well that have been influencing the economic system of Afghanistan.

The insufficient and unfavorable business environment is also one of the issues affecting Afghan economy. There have to be strong business laws governing the society and controlling the business. The laws should not only safeguard the rights of investors and businessmen but also make sure that the competition within the system is maintained on strong and fair footings. The evils like monopoly based on unfair competition must be tackled with properly and there should be strong bodies that control the prices within the markets, which at the present are non-existent and the businessmen are fixing the rates on their own. This has given rise to a political system that, on the exterior, is called as democratic but in reality is an ad-hoc arrangement that has no strong foundation.

Afghanistan needs to have strong economy so as to support other walks of life and most importantly to survive after the international supports dry. The country has to start from the institutions and basic infra-structure development and has to reach to a stable economy, wherein the businesses are able to function without any fear and inconsistency. The business institutions like ACCI need to develop an environment that can be galvanizing for both the national and international investors.

Moreover, the golden opportunities wherein Afghanistan can exert maximum and can get the best outcomes from must be discovered and they should be strengthened so as to push the country towards self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the businessmen and investors must also keep the national interests in their consideration while they establish their businesses and start getting the outcomes from them.

They have to keep this in their minds that the society as a whole has certain rights that have to be fulfilled by them.



Afghanistan's Peace Weavers

By Tadamichi Yamamoto

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Paradoxically, despite a horrific and seemingly endless war raging around them, there are brave citizens building peace across Afghanistan every day. The United Nations is doing its best to listen to each and every individual who stands up for peace. Indeed, the UN sees these actors as beacons of hope, lighting the way for change.

A few weeks back, women in several eastern provinces sat together and decided to nominate a delegation to engage with the Taliban with a goal to find a way to end local violence. This was not an easy decision for them to make. These women, disturbed at the cost of war in their own neighborhoods, did not, of course, act alone. They are a part of a much larger social spectrum, which includes male relatives, religious leaders, and even children. The brave women of Kunar not only demonstrated an incredible amount of courage, but they have reminded me that it is possible for individuals to stand against adversity by speaking up and insisting on peace, even in the most difficult circumstances.

We at the UN have a mandate to assist Afghans as they seek a solution to their conflict. Any future peace must be inclusive, drawing on the threads in a patchwork peace process from province to province, district to district. In Afghanistan there are many small examples that display an inclusive attitude - one that is essential to a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The analogy of an Afghan carpet works well to describe the process. Why? Peace must always include a social component - a stitching together of a social fabric that has been shredded by war.

Afghan women, in particular, are excellent peace weavers. Women and men - I can tell you from my own conversations and observations - both impact positive change on the ground through empowering peace activism, increasing solidarity and influencing narratives about how we all

understand peace. These collective Afghan weavers create momentum for peace across the country.

It is important, in my view, to be aware of all the work for peace being done from Kunar in the East to Herat in the West. For example, at a recent meeting, Dr. Habiba Sarabi, the deputy chair of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, brought together 36 women from 3 provinces. The individual initiatives put on display the creative will of all participants, including from one Kandahari woman, who explained how she had changed "60 minds in 60 days" through conversation and debate. She recalled one male elder, who after initially reacting to her overtures with outright hostility, eventually invited her into his home to speak about peace with his daughters.

This is the kind of dedicated leg-work that is desperately needed from both men and women to create a social consensus that not only leads to a political agreement, but will also provide the foundation for peaceful living after such an accord has been reached.

Much more can be done to encourage non-violent peace activism on the ground and amplify the message that community leaders carry. Many Afghans I listen to are demanding an end to violence and any further destruction of the social fabric. Their stories, woven together, give me hope that, in the coming months, more Afghans will work together at a grass roots level to repair trust and drive reconciliation.

I am convinced that it is from often unseen and varied acts of courage and commitment that Afghans will shape their own history. For each time a man or a woman stands up for peace, and acts selflessly to give peace as a gift to others, it creates a new thread of hope for all of us.

From many small and shining threads, carefully crossed with each other and woven together, Afghanistan as a nation can fashion a stable, open and peaceful future.

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Afghan Women's Addiction to Narcotic Drug

By Hujjatullah Zia

Scores of Afghan women are addicted to narcotic drugs.

To alleviate their pain and anguish, about 900,000 women and children seek solace in drugs, regardless of their ill effects. The graph of addiction to drugs is said to be on the rise in Afghanistan and women are highly prone to it for one reason or another. Cultural restrictions and religious taboos have not been able to hamper their involvement in the activity. This intake of drugs, however, has been counterproductive rather than mitigating sufferings. There are many motivating factors behind the drug addiction of Afghan women. Decades of war and violence are one of the main reasons. The patriarchal system of the Afghan government has marginalized them from social and political mainstream and curtailed their freedom. The Taliban regime treated women as pariahs. In traditional mindset and tribal structure, women are deemed to only satiate the men's carnal desires and are not allowed to get out without male supervision. Public and domestic violence against women has also increased to a great extent. Forced and under-age marriage prevails in the Taliban-dominated areas. Treating women as inferior creatures and stoning them to death in public have traumatized them and forced them to lessen their mental pressures through drug addiction. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the agony of women has continued due to the unending violence against them. The Afghan Constitution, which was approved in 2004, entitles men and women to exercise their rights and liberty freely. Discrimination has no room in the Constitution as Article 22 states, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law." Despite this, women in the country undergo violence both in public and private spheres. Consequently, some women become drug addicts because they use drugs as painkillers.

Social ills and contact with addicted individuals have also played a role in this regard. Living with their addicted spouses for years, women inhale the smoke and gradually get used to it. Some addicted men force their wives to use drugs to make them dependent on them and not ask for divorce; other women become addicted for existing in a sub-culture of addicted friends. They try drugs just for the heck of it and for having fun with friends.

Afghan women have easy access to drug because of their vast cultivation in different provinces. It goes without saying that militants, mainly the Taliban, capitalize on cultivating and smuggling drugs. The strongholds of the Taliban in Helmand province thrive on poppy production. Poppy forms the bulk of their financial support. It is for this reason that the Taliban have never declared cultivation of poppy as prohibited by religion though Islam forbids it. Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said earlier that international drug dealers and countries that provide transit facilities to them have earned 800 billion dollars from narcotic cultivation in the past 17 years. This is also a motivating force behind the addiction of Afghan women to drugs. Afghan women perform backbreaking labor, especially in the remote areas and do not have the time to sing lullabies to their children. To finish their household chores without disturbance, some women give their children drugs to keep them calm or to soothe their pain and this has also led to their children's addiction. Being part of an unhealthy environment comprising addicted families, colleagues and surroundings, women are further drawn to the unfortunate sub-culture. It is not difficult to understand that Afghan women are left at the mercy of social ills, financial constraints and political chal-

lenges. Their life and liberties are threatened by warring parties and they are viewed as inferior creatures in a traditional society. In the tribal belts, a predominantly parochial mindset exists which also includes domestic violence. Drugs are a panacea for the wounds and mental pressures of these women. The only question is that do drugs soothe pain and suffering?

The horrible consequences of drug addiction cannot be questioned. With an increase in the addiction rate, the graph of poverty also rises and increases the vulnerability of women. To meet their financial needs, some addicted women succumb to the carnal desires of men. Many other women fall victim to rape. The involvement of both men and women in narcotics further paves the ground for crime and corruption. Women are also abused by drug dealers and smugglers and their pressing needs multiply their susceptibility to social ills.

Addicted women play a highly destructive role in society. They spoil the future of their children by providing an unhealthy environment and handing down drug addiction to their progeny and both become a burden on society. With an increase in the addicted population, the crime rate rises and society is further dragged into the social and cultural quagmire. Addiction also breeds poverty. The addicted individuals are not able to work; they can only beg on the streets or commit crimes. Further, these people push their families to violence. Addicted women vent their rage and anger on their children when they cannot get drugs. Addicted women then become mental, physical and emotional baggage and cannot play a positive role in society. Addicted women are also exposed to degradation and mistreatment. The males around them not only lose trust in them but also insult them and label them as criminals. Socially, the entire family of an addicted woman is stigmatized. Addicted women bear the brunt of humiliation, rape and sexual harassment. Cultivating and using drug is prohibited under the Constitution of Afghanistan. Article 7 says, "...The state shall prevent all kinds of terrorist activities, cultivation and smuggling of narcotics, and production and use of intoxicants." How come then that drug addiction among both men and women is so common in Afghanistan?

The way public and domestic violence is perpetrated against drug addicted women in the country is against national and international laws. It is clear that the rights and dignity of these women are trampled upon with impunity. Though the law provides protection but the judiciary and executive do not implement it in an effective manner. Perhaps it is the inaction of the government's apparatus that further worsens the situation. The Ministry of Counternarcotic simply does not do enough. The United States government estimates that in 2014 Afghanistan cultivated 211,000 hectares of poppy and produced 6,300 metric tons of opium. Despite pledging to intensify its drug-control efforts at the December 2014 London Conference on Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani's administration has not succeeded in tackling the issue and the country still remains one of the world's largest drug producers.

To reduce female addiction, the government must eliminate such factors as combating terrorist networks and drug mafias, prosecuting violators of women's rights, raising public awareness through short-term seminars, implementing anti-drug laws effectively, providing more investment opportunities and ending corruption in the government machinery. The Ulema Council also needs to act proactively and canvass against poppy cultivation on the one hand and against male and female drug addiction on the other, and focus on the social harms and the adverse effects on society.

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