

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



February 15, 2017

Ex-Governor of Bamyan Wins N-Peace Award

Though everyday there are different news items related to insecurity and problems in Afghanistan, every now and then there are certain pieces of news that are encouraging and highlight great achievements by Afghans. In one of such pieces of news, it was highlighted that Habiba Sarabi, the deputy chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC), was awarded N-Peace Award under the Untold Story Category on Sunday, February 12 in Thailand. N-Peace awards are given by N-Peace Network, which is a network of peace advocates of different countries in Asia (Pakistan, Nepal, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Philippines) that advance women's and peace issues. It is coordinated by UNDP's Bangkok Regional Hub and supports women's leadership in conflict prevention, recovery, peace-building and more.

Sarabi was honored for her unrelenting work to bring peace to Afghanistan, while ensuring attention is paid to gender equality and women's empowerment. Her work spans over more than two decades and includes teaching girls in refugee camps while in exile in the 1990s in Pakistan, governor of Bamyan, cabinet minister, and currently as a deputy chair of the HPC where she works to include women in the peace process. She was also the first woman to become a governor in Afghanistan and served in the position in Bamyan from 2005 to 2013.

The achievement is really huge, considering the status of women in the Afghanistan and the attitude of society towards them. Nonetheless, it remains a fact that Afghanistan, like any other country, has many talented women who can play their role in earning a reputable name for the country and introducing the necessary positive changes within the society.

Unfortunately, Afghan society has a history of discriminatory behavior towards women and it can be easily observed that even now the incidents violating women rights have not been stopped though there have been many claims of developments.

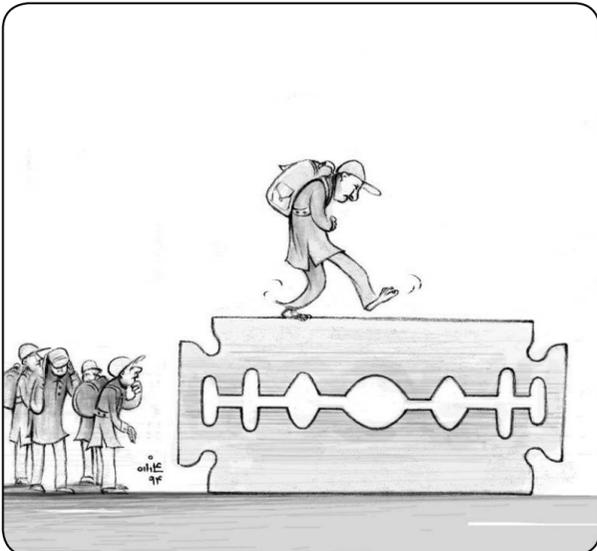
In fact the changes are prevalent only on the exterior while from within the Afghan society still lacks the modernity and development it needs in order to reach to a respectable position.

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

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. There have been many incidents when the lunatic culprits have thrown acids on the faces of the girls who go to schools. 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.

It is unfortunate to note that Afghan authorities and many important personalities themselves have favored the recommendations and suggestions to limit the participation of women in social and political lives. As most of these authorities are themselves nourished in an extremist patriarchal society and do not have much consideration regarding the role and empowerment of women and consider it against their tribal values that they come out of their houses, they would never follow a movement to save women from violence and make them achieve their due place in Afghan society. It is really important that government must not support the discriminatory ideas against the women. Afghan society is a society that has been dominated by male chauvinism and its history has been filled with various incidents of ruthless violence against women. There are different sorts of such incidents every now and then in different parts of country even in today's Afghanistan. Government can prove to be a hope for the women. If it itself encourages the intentions that may undermine the rights of women, it would be very difficult to expect the same from common people. Moreover, the international community in this regard can also play an important role.

Though it has mentioned on almost all the important occasions that human rights, especially women rights, have to be given top priority by the Afghan government if it wills to have the support of major countries, it has not been able to make Afghan government pursue a really practical and comprehensive strategy regarding the issue, which is the only solution for preserving the women rights and dignity to a certain extent in Afghan society. If given their due rights, Afghan women have all the potential and prudence to inspire the world with their abilities and prove that they are not inferior to men at all.



Iran Should be Dealt in Different Way

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

The United States new President Donald Trump decision to quickly slap new sanctions on Iran after it conducted a ballistic missile test clearly signals the hard turn the new administration intends to take with Tehran. Neutralizing the Iranian threat in the Middle East has been an American aim since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Arabs and Israelis alike will cheer Trump's current hard line on Iran. But Iran is among the toughest foreign policy challenges United States have faced and President Trump should be careful to avoid ill-planned early actions against Iran which may turn out to be blunders.

The Trump administration is totally mistaken if it believes that a ratcheting up of pressure, coupled with closer policy alignment with Israel and Saudi Arabia, will force an Iranian retreat in the region. The Islamic Republic is too deeply entrenched in the region's conflict zones and it will nearly impossible to impose any quick retreat. By all credible accounts, Iran can firmly stand its ground even if it risks a major crisis in US-Iranian relations. Iran is a hardened adversary, despite its political isolation it is very much required to eradicate the Islamic State from the region. So rather than being isolated Iran should be engaged.

The U.S. and other world powers took years to find a common ground with Iran, which prevented the country from acquiring nuclear weapons in return for removal of international sanctions. The deal, which was called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) allowed Iran to mend ties with European countries, boost its oil production and trade with other countries, thereby minimising the pain its people had suffered due to economic sanctions.

This resulted in empowering the hands of Iranian moderates who wants integration of Iran with Western economies. This progress stands threatened by President Trump's current hostility towards Iran. Recent sanctions could strengthen hard-liners in the Iranian regime who are seeking to escalate tensions with the United States.

There is a certain equation between the US and Iran. If Iran provokes and the US does not react, Iran's deterrent power goes up because it learns it can do these provocations with no consequences. Surely Iran has carried out provocative activities like- carried out additional missile tests, stepped up its military presence in Syria and tries to provide "game-changing weapons" to Hezbollah.

This all should not be ignored by United States but it should not be dealt in the way like Trump administration is doing now. All the current measures which has been taken are counterproductive.

There is an urgent need to develop some new options to deter and contain Iranian activities of concern. Some of measures which can work in current situation are following

Diplomatic engagement

The White House and State Department should look for opportunities to expand bilateral contacts, and to identify areas for cooperation. Beginning with work in multilateral settings on global and transnational problems may be more productive than an early focus on regional or bilateral issues, which will remain fraught for all parties.

Heavy US Military Presence

Heavy military presence in the region will be an essential part of the US strategy, even if deployment numbers and other quantitative metrics vary over time. The larger message to Iran, will be that the United States has vital interests in the region, an enduring commitment to regional stability, and an interest in preventing interstate conflict and intrastate destabilization.

Negotiations on ballistic missiles program

The strategy will need to delineate what aspects of Iran's long-term commitment to developing this capability are unacceptable. Iran is unlikely to entirely roll back this program, which derives from its vulnerability to Iraqi missiles in the Iran- Iraq war. But the United States may be able to define some parameters to reduce the risks of miscalculation by Iran or its neighbours. While urging Iran to reduce the size and scope of the program, and make clear its conventional weapon only mission.

No country in the Middle East has Iran's combination of geographic size, strategic location, large and educated population. Iran has been the most effective country at leveraging the ongoing disorder across the Middle East to expand its regional influence.

Tehran has done this by providing substantial political, military and financial backing to allies and proxies in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Iran now stands at the apex of arc of influence stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean, from the borders of NATO to the borders of Israel and along the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It commands the loyalties of tens of thousands in allied militias and proxy armies.

They have been joined by thousands of members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's most prestigious military wing, who have acquired meaningful battlefield experience in the process. So it is in nobody interest to press Iran to behave more militantly rather it should be engaged at various levels to promote the Islamic republic to play a constructive role to strengthen stability in the region.

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The Global Economy's Surprising Resilience

By Jim O'Neill

Disconcerting political developments in the United States and the United Kingdom might lead one to conclude that an already challenged world economy will struggle even more in the near term. But as we continue into 2017, the cyclical evidence actually suggests otherwise.

Since my days as Chief Economist at Goldman Sachs, I have kept an eye on six indicators from around the world that, taken together, provide a reliable snapshot of what the global economy will look like for the next six months. Right now, all six indicators show more promise than they have for some time, and only one of them has fallen slightly from a recent high.

The first indicator is weekly unemployment claims in the US, from which one can gauge the overall strength of the US economy. Economists are rightly trained to treat unemployment as a lagging indicator, but these data can also be useful in forecasting the near future. US jobless claims are always up to date, because they are produced weekly, and statistical evidence suggests that they are a leading indicator for US equity prices. As of last week, jobless claims remained rather low, as they have for some time, which bodes well for US stock markets.

Similarly, the Institute for Supply Management Manufacturing Index provides a pretty good preview of the US economy for the next 3-6 months, even though manufacturing comprises a relatively small share of GDP. Like the latest jobless claims, the ISM's numbers are currently giving cause for optimism.

A third indicator is a subcomponent of the same ISM survey: manufacturers' new orders and inventories. Currently, new orders are increasing and inventories are low, which suggests that businesses will have to produce more in the coming months to satisfy those orders.

Looking beyond the US, a fourth indicator is the ratio of Chinese retail spending relative to industrial production (adjusted for inflation). These figures give us a glimpse of both cyclical trends and China's structural rebalancing away from exports and toward domestic consumption.

This will arguably be one of the most important indicators for both China and the rest of the global economy for years to come. The ratio of Chinese monthly retail sales to industrial production, while erratic, has been slowly trending higher since 2008, and there appears to have been another uptick in consumption recently.

This is why I am less worried than others about frequently cited risks confronting the Chinese economy. Chinese consumer spending has remained strong despite the slowdown in industrial output and investment and the government's efforts to constrain spending on luxury goods.

Some might object that Chinese data cannot be trusted. But I do not see why the data on one side of the ratio would be any more or less reliable than data on the other side. Why would Chinese officials fiddle with consumption data while allowing the industrial-output figures to register a

decline. In any case, we have to work with what we have. A fifth indicator is South Korean trade data, which is consistently reported on the first day of each month after trades occur - faster than any other country.

South Korea has an open economy and trading partners around the world, including the US, China, Japan, and the European Union, so one can extrapolate from its trade data to draw conclusions about the state of global trade.

After trending down in recent years, South Korean trade since November has shown signs of recovering, notably in terms of export growth; and in January, it bounced back significantly. To be sure, this finding is at odds with all of the eulogies for globalization that one hears these days, and Donald Trump's decidedly protectionist administration in the US could now send global trade into a long retreat. But South Korea's recent data suggest that globalization still has some life left in it, and that 2017 is off to a decent start.

In fact, barring the worst-case scenario under Trump, it is possible that the slowdown in global trade in recent years will turn out to be a temporary phenomenon.

It may have been a singular occurrence that reflected a variety of factors, including the euro crisis; continued economic weakness in many European countries; the sharp decline in commodity prices; dramatic slowdowns in Brazil, Russia, and other emerging economies; and tighter regulations for international banks, which might have hindered trade finance. The last key indicator is the monthly Ifo Business Climate Index in Germany, which contains useful cyclical data for Europe overall, owing to Germany's centrality in the continent's economy.

The Ifo survey has reported positive results in recent months, although the data were more promising in December than in January.

Taken together, these six indicators suggest to me that the global economy might now be growing at a rate of more than 4%. This is the fastest growth in a number of years - although the last decade's average growth rate of 3.3% was barely lower than the rate in the previous decade - and close to the pace of the previous two decades before that. At the same time, the six indicators cannot tell us anything about what will happen after the next few months. It is an open question whether global economic growth will remain strong, strengthen further, or start to weaken.

It has been interesting to watch growth accelerate in the face of shocks such as the UK's Brexit referendum and Trump's election. And yet it is unclear why this is happening. Some might say the trend is a result of policy decisions in the US and UK, but far more would probably say that it is happening despite those decisions. Unfortunately, there are no indicators that provide an answer to this question - only time will tell. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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