

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

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Pros and Cons of "United National Government"

Having started the negotiation with Taliban both government and masses anticipate peace may turn a reality. Nevertheless, its premature to expect this dream come true. Factually, the rumours of peace talks has produced twin effects of more anguish than gratification. Many people reluctantly agree to trust taliban – as they find it hard enough to unlearn the ruthless tales of atrocities unleashed by Taliban couple of years ago. It was witnessed taliban claiming to be sole stake holder in Afghan politics never stood by the interest of masses –instead coerced mass to submit to their commands, otherwise severe punishment awaited their fate. Despite such grievances the political circle forsee to receive taliban back in the politics, realizing a shift in their resolve.

If talk is one for the resort, better be tested for tangible if not concrete solution to Afghan conflict. The first round of this test took place in Marri, a picnic spot few kilometer off Islamabd, the capital city of Pakistan. The talks consisted delegate of Afghan government and taliban leaders as potential negotiators –Pakistan, US and China representatives partook as observers. The delegate of both the Taliban and Afghan government in their recent face-to-face but closed-doors talks exchanged certain demands. The demand of peace truce is one that would turn about the talks.

The delegate of Afghan government demanded Taliban an immediate ceasefire a condition for continuation of peace talks. This demands gestures government's weaker position in the talks –intimating the display of more resilience on its part. It was believed the government negotiating in the position of strength can only make Taliban submit to some of its hard born demands and render compromises. It has always been a military tactic –acquiring the position of strength will earn you a better and dominant position to be heard. It is witnessed Taliban soon after the onset of round of informal talks multiplied their attacks inflicting greater ruins to government. Even the former President Hamid Karzai called upon all warring parties to stop fighting in the wake of crucial round of talks between the Afghan government and Taliban. The inception of ceasefire might not easily be won –given Taliban's splintered groups may or may not accept the laid demands. It said that Taliban during this course of time is divided into different faction; each group showing allegiance to different leaders. The query whether the leaders mandated to negotiate at peace parley is in harmony with the warring Taliban on the ground, is yet to be seen? If the mainstream Taliban contributes to a common umbrella of shared interest -they will exercise resilience towards core leadership and stick to peace treaty. Otherwise the peace talks will carry on amidst the continued attacks from non-conciliating factions. This move will simply turn and twist the government to opt for other options.

It is to none's surprise Taliban demands an acceptable share in the ongoing setup. Agreeably, in the latest round of talks Taliban referred the ceasefire conditioned to formation of United National Government. Though the details of this government till date is uncertain – however following the political temperament of Taliban, the demand of reservation of lion's share in the current democratic setup, may be a credible guess. It has long been the National Unity Government (NIG) leaders do not reach to finale opting for the head of electoral reform commission and Ministry of defense. After pledging to form United National Government the problems may further complicate –provided both the leaders have to give off some their owned seats, indeed. The reliable media source disclosed Afghan side gave in to induct the third tier leaderships in the government –notwithstanding they insisted for the first-tier of leadership. The Afghan government long ago prior to formation of cabinet tipped-off sparing some ministries for Taliban leaderships. It seemed a deliberate move to draw in Taliban on the table of negotiation. Instantly, at present when Taliban agreed to step in –the government has to sort out the share they can afford levying to Taliban.

The regional powers like China already working on enhanced security of this region have had facilitated both the peace talks and pledged an increase security cooperation with Afghanistan by providing security equipment, technology and training assistance. These assurances came on the eve of BRICS summit that took place in Russia, previously. The commitment was made by China's President Xi Jinping during a meeting with his Afghan counterpart President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani during the summit. The president suggested that regional states should shift focus to launch big development projects, multiply trade and business and stabilize economy aimed at countering challenges. It's good Mr. President to remind a bit of our responsibilities we have to turn this perception false that this land is the breeding ground for terrorists. Undeniably, without seeking collaboration of international community Afghanistan alone partially can this land rid of terrorists? It is witnessed the president making tones of clarification that even echoed on the edge of the summit. The president assured the partakers that the soil of Afghanistan would not be used against the interest of other countries. Taliban one of the elements of insecurity is talked to at present at costs foreseeable subsequently. Undeniably, the spread of Daesh is another nightmare the world seems concerned for. Afghanistan has to lay concrete measures to restrain spread of other terror groups.

Financing for Development in Asia and the Pacific

By Dr. Shamshad Akhtar

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan

The world eagerly awaits the outcome of the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development this month which will be a real test of the international community's commitment to sustainable development. In this context, it is worth underscoring that the Asia-Pacific region – a dynamic and vibrant market – has already been at the forefront of deliberations on financing for development and has endorsed initiatives that will unleash its resource potential. With substantial scope for tapping domestic resource mobilization and infrastructure financing, the region will build on the development achievements secured in past years which have simultaneously driven global growth. Our region has made impressive gains in reducing the incidence of extreme poverty from a staggering 53 percent in 1990 to 12 percent today, illustrating its resilience to the 2008 financial crisis given that most countries strengthened their financial systems regulatory frameworks in the aftermath of Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998. Trade growth has remained steady, with the level of intra-regional trade second only to that of the European Union.

The key to financial stability and people's well-being will be their improved access to financing for development, which involves broadening coverage of financing to all segments of society, including the unbanked and sustainable businesses. Given the growing demands to implement the ambitious and wide-ranging sustainable development agenda in the period after 2015, financing systems will need to be harnessed further to channel the right financing mix and blend. Home to 60 percent of the world's population, ESCAP estimates that the financing requirements of the region, which are growing faster than advanced economies, could be anywhere between \$2.1 trillion and \$2.5 trillion per year to fund a comprehensive sustainable development agenda which includes ending poverty, improving access to basic services, the provision of social protection, infrastructure development and addressing both climate mitigation and adaptation. Asia Pacific, which accounts for almost 57 per cent of global trade finance transactions, needs to launch initiatives to meet the region's trade finance requirements which currently account for more than half of the global trade finance gap, estimated at nearly \$2 trillion.

Inadequate levels of finance can hurt firms' productive and export capacities and limit their participation to only low value-added stages of production.

While the amount of money involved may seem daunting, the region is nonetheless known for its high saving rates, build-up of reserves and ability to attract large capital flows and remittances. Moreover, in 2013, the region's fiscal revenue was estimated to be \$4 trillion, and private sector savings were estimated to amount to another \$6 trillion. In the same year the stock of financial assets of the region's most wealthy individuals amounted to \$35 trillion.

If financial resources are, in principle, more than sufficient to fund the required investments in sustainable development, why then, are they not being applied more effectively? The first reason is that investments in sustainable development, such as social protection or climate change mitigation and adaptation, have high social returns but are perceived to have low or zero private returns in the traditional sense. A second rea-

son is the skewed distribution of financial needs and resources with a few countries having a repository of large surplus of funds, while the majority have needs exceeding their own financial resources. Lack of long term and risk capital is a serious obstacle to the implementation of key infrastructure projects – including cross-border infrastructure – which has the potential for high payoffs for the region's competitiveness and prosperity.

Recognizing these challenges, Asia and the Pacific, with ESCAP's support, has engaged in two high-level consultation processes in last twelve months. Conversations between regional political leaders, financing experts, the business community and civil society have led to a consensus on a tangible and actionable agenda for dealing with these financing shortfalls. Among others, proposals have been tabled on:

- Establishing an Asia Pacific Forum to raise tax-to-GDP ratios by broadening tax bases, removing exemptions and loopholes, and improving administrative efficiency and collection. These should be implemented.

- Better and efficient deployment of public expenditures to reduce wasteful and unproductive expenditures.

- Implementing BEPS (base erosion and profit shifting) by promoting regional cooperation among national tax authorities with the aim of reducing revenue losses due to tax evasion by multinational corporations and to illicit financial flows.

- Ensuring that countries deliver on official development assistance and directing it where it is most needed and leveraging more financing.

The region will further benefit from a range of diversified approaches and mechanisms of South-South and triangular cooperation. On one hand, this involves the concrete actions taken by China, Russia and India to operationalize new development banks, establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Silk Road Fund. On the other hand, there has been welcome capital enhancement of the Asian Development Bank. Close cooperation between these new and existing multilateral development banks will play a critical role in financing sustainable and resilient infrastructure in the region, including supporting better transboundary connectivity.

There is further scope for developing regional financial markets by adopting modern, harmonized financial regulations and institutions which would facilitate mutual recognition arrangements – where two or more States agree to recognize the adequacy of each other's regulation. This can facilitate the trading of securities across countries and can lay the groundwork for developing a regional capital market at a later stage. The ASEAN Capital Market Forum – consisting of capital market regulators of the 10 ASEAN members – is the first move in the region to develop mutual recognition in primary offerings, financial intermediaries, market professionals, collective investment schemes, and securities exchanges.

The good news is that the Asia-Pacific region is not waiting but has already moved towards providing the necessary means to implement these sustainable development goals. Although the region has taken a leading role in these first important steps, it is vital that this momentum be maintained, that the consensus developed be maintained and implemented, so that Asia and the Pacific can continue to lead on inclusive and sustainable development.

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Ramadan – Conveying the Message of Humanity

By Hujjatullah Zia

In the holy month of Ramadan, besides satiating spiritual thirst and exercising ethical codes, people will have to decrease social strata and bridge the gap between rich and poor. It stresses equality among all layers of society – especially between the haves and have-nots. It is believed that social reasons behind fasting are more salient than individual ones.

Fasting in Ramadan develops in a person the real spirit of social belonging, of unity and brotherhood, and of equality before God. This spirit is the natural product of the fact that when people fast they feel that they are joining the whole Muslim society in observing the same duty, in the same manner, at the same time, for the same motives, and for the same end. No sociologist or historian can say that there has been at any period of history anything comparable to this powerful institution of Islam: Fasting in the month of Ramadan. People have been crying throughout the ages for acceptable belonging, for unity, for brotherhood, for equality, but how echoless their voices have been, and how very little success they have met. Ramadan gives us a break and provides us with a rare opportunity to think about our own selves, our future, and our families. It is a time to give ourselves a mental break and to temporarily forget about the hundreds of worries and stresses we are constantly bombarded with. In hectic times, such as ours, this valuable time to think about our lives, on individual basis, is a luxury and is desperately needed! It is a unique month of self-analysis, and of taking stock of one's moral and spiritual assets and liabilities.

Fasting indoctrinates us in patience, unselfishness, and gratitude. When we fast we feel the pains of deprivation and hunger, and learn how to endure it patiently. The meaning of this powerful experience in a social and humanitarian context is that we are much quicker than anybody else in sympathizing with the oppressed and needy around the world, and responding to their needs. "It is the month to visit the poor, the sick, and the needy to share their sorrows. It is the month where the food, sustenance and the earnings of a believing Muslim increases and they are blessed," says Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) a man who was known for his noble humanitarian causes, for social justice, and for being the first to respond to other's needs, despite the fact that he himself lived a very simple and humble life. It is only during such a trying time as Ramadan that we can reflect on the condition of those in this world who may not be as fortunate

as us.

Fasting elevates the human spirit and increases our awareness of God. It strengthens our will-power as we learn to rise above our lower desires. The institution of fasting is both unique and a shared experience in human history. From the very beginning of time, humans have struggled to master their physical and psychological selves: their bodies and their emotions. Hunger is one the most powerful urges that we experience. Many, through over- or under-eating or consumption of unhealthy foods, abuse this urge. Thus, when a person purposefully denies something to their own self that it craves, they are elevating their mind above their body, and their reason and will above their carnal passions. "A fasting person empties his stomach of all the material things: to fill his soul with peace and blessings, to fill his heart with love and sympathy, to fill his spirit with piety and faith, to fill his mind with wisdom and resolution".

When we remain thirsty and hungry in Ramadan we experience the affliction that the poor and needy people of the society experience the whole year. Therefore, fasting is a way of bridging the gap between the different classes and in and out groups in the society. While fasting, the poor and the rich are all equal in the eyes of Allah and wealth does not matter in Allah's eyes. As it is rightly said, "Allah does not look at your wealth and your body; in fact He looks at your deeds." This very feeling helps the poor to overcome the "inferiority complex." On the other hand, the rich also realize the truth of the world and feel themselves equal to the poor, hence eliminating pride and "superiority complex."

Besides spiritual cleansing, fasting has numerous, scientifically proven, benefits for our physical health and mental well-being. The time, length and nature of the Islamic fast all contribute to its overall positive effect. One of the medical benefits is a much-needed rest to the digestive system. The reduced food intake during the day allows the body to concentrate on getting rid of harmful dietary toxins accumulated as natural by-products of food digestion throughout the year. Moreover, as a general note, it has been observed that underfed animals live longer than their heavily fed counterparts and suffer fewer illnesses during their lives.

Overall, the month of Ramadan intends to revive moral standards, religious values and social norms. It injects new blood into the society so as to energize ethical mores. The individuals should change their natural character into good one and practice it in their whole life. Likewise, Muslims must learn unity, social solidarity and brotherhood and discard from all evils and harming their human fellows.

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