

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



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Increasing Number of Afghan IDPs

Each year, instability and insecurity compel many people throughout Afghanistan to leave their homes and search for refuge somewhere where their survival can be guaranteed. Unfortunately, they always do not find what they leave for and have to go through myriads of problems even in the new place or on the way to the new place. In most of the cases, many people do not even choose their destinations. Driven away by insecurity and poverty, they do not have anything in mind except running away from death and misery.

There are many people from Afghanistan who opt to migrate to other countries. A large number of Afghan refugees and immigrants can be found in European countries, Canada, Australia, US and the neighboring countries; particularly, Pakistan and Iran. They definitely face various problems and there have been many occasions when their troubles have been identified; however, there is another section of the population that leave their homes but do not leave their country, which means that they move from one place to another within their own country. They are identified as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and, just like the immigrants, they also face different sorts of problems. However, their troubles are not highlighted as often as that of the refugees or immigrants.

A recent report by Amnesty International (IA), My Children Will Die This Winter: Afghanistan's Broken Promise to the Displaced, shows that the number of people displaced in Afghanistan because of the prevailing violence and poverty has more than doubled over the past three years - it has climbed from 500,000 to 1.2 million. The number is really large and shows how increasing insecurity and consistent poverty have victimized the poor people of Afghanistan. And, the trouble is not just the increasing number of the IDPs but also the different sorts of trouble these all people face while they become IDPs.

According to the report, the IDPs face numerous problems including inadequate shelter, a lack of food and water as well as access to education, healthcare and employment. Unfortunately, this large number of people with so many troubles have not been able to gain much attention, neither by national authorities nor by international organizations. Champa Patel, AI's South Asia Director, said in a statement, "While the world's attention seems to have moved on from Afghanistan, we risk forgetting the plight of those left behind by the conflict... Even after fleeing their homes to seek safety, increasing numbers of Afghans are languishing in appalling conditions in their own country, and fighting for their survival with no end in sight."

It is important to see that this report highlights mostly the physiological needs of the people; there are so many other requirements as well that they should get. Their psychological needs are also imperative but because there is no arrangement even for the physiological needs, the psychological and emotional needs are out of question. It is really difficult for the people to leave their homes and their birthplaces. The new places are always unknown to them and it is really difficult for them to adjust at such places. Moreover, the new places do not always welcome them with open arms. The people already living at that place may not be happy by the arrival of new people and may not be ready to share the limited resources that they have.

Few among them may be economically sound and they may have travelled because of insecurity. Only they are able to start their lives anew, while most of them suffer from poverty and thus they have no other option but to find support in one way or the other. In some cases, the government or private support may reach to them but that also proves to be insufficient or ill-managed.

In some cases, they are provided some shelters, where they can live and some food and drinking water; however, that is not adequate for them to stay healthy and fight diseases. A statement by Mastan, a 50-year-old woman living in an IDP camp in Herat, quoted by AI, says, "Even an animal would not live in this hut, but we have to. I would prefer to be in prison rather than in this place, at least in prison I would not have to worry about food and shelter."

In the wake of such a condition, the arrangements by the Afghan government are almost non-existent. According to AI report, Afghan authorities promised to improve the conditions of the IDPs; however, the promises have not been fulfilled, instead the daily threats of forced eviction, from both government and private actors, of the IDPs have persisted on daily basis.

The Report also highlights that in 2014, the Afghan government did endorse a new National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, raising hopes of displaced people and their advocates that the situation would change. However, the Report finds that the policy has not delivered for IDPs. Despite the comprehensive approach outlined, very little has happened in practice. In reality, the policy is a failed promise and the situation for those who are internally displaced has deteriorated in the period since the policy was introduced.

The Lagging Electoral Preparations

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Among many shortcomings and failures, Government failed to deliver the electoral reforms and lead the preparations for the upcoming parliamentary and provincial council elections. While there are efforts to speed up electoral reforms and preparations for the upcoming parliamentary elections, there are enormous challenges hindering election preparations. The government is now reportedly attempting to take steps to further facilitate the arrangements for holding the upcoming parliamentary and provincial council elections. According to the reports, a number of senior officials including President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah have attended a meeting with the aim to facilitate electoral preparations and speed up the required arrangements. The government has tasked several government agencies with overseeing and coordinating the ongoing preparations.

The government has decided to set up two working teams headed by ministries of finance and interior affairs with the tasks to follow up with security and budget issues of the upcoming elections. Afghanistan's security council has also asked the security agencies to assess the situation for holding the elections and come up with a comprehensive security plan for the elections. The flurries of activities and meetings to speed up the preparations and follow up the ongoing arrangements has long been expected, but the government has been unable to resolve many key issues related to the elections to pave the ground for smooth preparations for the elections. Though coming late, the efforts to boost the processes of preparations in areas of security and funding are coming as promising moves in the electoral efforts.

Lack of sufficient funding and the growing insecurity across the country are two major challenges ahead of holding the parliamentary and provincial council elections. In both areas the risks are too high, and failure to resolve the challenges could potentially derail the process or cause further delays in holding the elections. The Afghan government needs to persuade the international community to provide the required budget for holding the election. However, being deeply skeptical to the transparency and legitimacy of elections, the international community has so far refused to fund the parliamentary elections. The donor countries have made it clear that they will only provide aid to Afghanistan if the Afghan electoral system is reformed based on the political agreement that led to the formation of the national unity government.

The government of Afghanistan says it will shoulder a share of the election budget and will persuade the international community to support and fund Afghanistan's elections. However, the government is far from being able to have a commitment from the donor countries for funding the elections. The government has failed in many regards or been so slow to fulfill its pledges in reforming the electoral system, thus failing to raise the required funding for the elections. Designat-

ing a government ministry for working on arranging the election budget does not seem to be the right response or solution to the problem. The government needs to demonstrate progresses in implementing the agreement on reforming the country's electoral system. There will no progresses in many of the key electoral preparations if the Afghan government fails to have the required budget soon.

Security is another key matter for the upcoming elections. With the Taliban naming a hardliner leader to replace Mullah Mansoor, the group will likely further escalate the insurgency by organizing more attacks and targeting electoral workers and voting stations in towns and districts across the country. The legitimacy of the elections is closely related to improvement of security across the country and particularly in southern and eastern provinces, where on one hand voters are intimidated by militants and, on the other hand, chances of electoral frauds are high. The government needs to devise a broad and comprehensive security strategy to safeguard the elections and prevent potential disruptions to the elections by the militant groups. Hopefully, the security agencies have shown in the past that security for elections is something manageable. In previous elections, Afghanistan's security and defense forces largely foiled Taliban's attacks and prevent major disruptions to the elections.

Government's commitment to deliver reforms is the key for success and legitimacy of the upcoming elections. The security required for elections is crucial but manageable. The national unity government needs to be concerned more on its obligations. The biggest threat to viability and legitimacy of the upcoming parliamentary elections is not lack of security or other challenges but lack of resolve of the government to reform the system and ensure soundness and transparency of the elections. The case was the same in previous elections. While Afghanistan's security agencies managed to provide relatively peaceful environment and the international community supported the processes, many of the elections were marred by frauds and irregularities plunging the country into the brink of a potential crisis.

The government is expected to be able to manage budget and security issues of the upcoming parliamentary elections, but there is no certainty over the success of the electoral reforms which is key for success of the elections. In order for the government to overcome the challenges facing the elections, the leaders of the national unity government need to demonstrate sufficient political will to lead a sound electoral process. This is while there is a bunch of works to be done by the authorities to make preparations for holding the elections. The electoral laws need to be finalized by the parliament as they are going to govern the whole process. The government should support the selection committee to go ahead with picking competent individuals as commissioners of the two electoral bodies.

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Reigniting Emerging-Economy Growth

By Michael Spence

It is no secret that emerging economies are facing serious challenges, which have undermined their once-explosive growth and weakened their development prospects. Whether they return to the path of convergence with the advanced economies will largely depend on how they approach an increasingly complex economic environment. Of course, these economies' development path was never simple or smooth. But for most of the post-World War II period, until as recently as ten years ago, it was relatively clear-cut. Countries needed to open their economies at a sensible pace; leverage global technology and demand; specialize in tradable sectors; pursue a lot of investment (some 30% of GDP); and promote foreign direct investment, with appropriate provisions for knowledge transfer. Throughout this process, the emerging economies recognized the importance of allowing market mechanisms to work, guaranteeing property rights, and safeguarding macroeconomic and financial stability. Perhaps most important, they knew that they had to focus on generating employment, particularly in urban areas and modernizing sectors, and on inclusiveness more broadly.

As they pursued this agenda, emerging economies experienced stuttering starts and numerous crises, often associated with excessive debt, currency traps, and high inflation. And, upon reaching middle-income levels, countries confronted the policy and structural pitfalls that accompany the transition to high-income status. Nonetheless, in an increasingly open global environment, characterized by strong growth (and demand) in the advanced economies, the emerging economies managed to make huge and rapid progress.

That all changed after the 2008 global financial crisis. To be sure, the core of the development agenda remains the same. But it is vastly more complicated. One set of complications arises from external global imbalances, distortions, and heightened volatility in capital flows, exchange rates, and relative prices. Given that such challenges are essentially new, there is no proven roadmap for overcoming them. After all, the developed economies have not previously engaged in the kind of unconventional monetary policy seen in recent years - a period characterized by ultra-low interest rates and ultra-fast cross-border capital flows. For the emerging economies, with their relatively illiquid financial markets, such trends encourage over-dependence on low-cost external capital, which can be withdrawn in a heartbeat. Rock-bottom borrowing costs also spur excessive reliance on leverage, weakening the will to undertake reforms needed to boost potential growth - and further exacerbating the economy's vulnerability to a shift in interest rates or investor sentiment.

Making matters worse for the resource-rich emerging economies, commodity prices have plummeted since 2014. After a prolonged period of accelerating demand growth, notably from China, governments came to regard high commodity prices as semi-permanent - an assumption that caused them to overestimate their future revenues. Now that prices have dropped, these countries are facing huge imbalances and fiscal strain. And governments are not alone; the private sector, too, relied on rosy assumptions to justify imprudently high levels of leverage. Slower growth in the advanced economies has also weakened trade flows, adding to the headwinds. As Mohamed El-Erian has observed, in the global economy, your neighborhood - the economies

to which you have economic or financial links - matters. That is all the more true for the emerging economies, which have become highly dependent on their neighbors.

In short, emerging economies have been challenged by externally generated macroeconomic shifts, unconventional monetary policies, widespread volatility, and slow growth in developed markets. Without much of a playbook to guide them, it is unsurprising that their ability to cope with these challenges has varied considerably. Generally, those that have fared better, such as India, have combined sound growth fundamentals and reforms with pragmatic and activist measures to counter the external sources of volatility. India has also, of course, benefited from lower oil prices. Commodity exporters like Brazil have struggled more, but not just because of falling natural-resource prices. In fact, the decline in prices, together with the reversal of capital flows, exposed weaknesses in the underlying growth patterns that had previously been masked by favorable conditions. Now there is yet another challenge, which is becoming larger by the year. Whichever path emerging economies choose for addressing these challenges must also account for the fundamental shift driven by digital capital-intensive technologies. While digital technologies have created new kinds of jobs in high-tech sectors and the sharing economy, among others, they have been reducing and dis-intermediating "routine" white- and blue-collar jobs.

Here, rapid advances in robotics are particularly relevant, as increasingly sophisticated machines threaten to supplant low-cost labor in a variety of sectors. The high fixed and low variable costs of these technologies mean that once robots become more cost-effective than human labor, the trend will not reverse, especially given that automated assembly can be located close to markets, rather than where labor is cheapest. Jobs in electronics assembly, which play a huge role in global trade and has helped to drive growth in many emerging economies - notably, China - are particularly vulnerable. While trades involving sewing - textiles, apparel, shoes - are not yet being automated much, it is probably only a matter of time before they are. As the classic sources of early comparative advantage dwindle, countries - particularly earlier-stage developing countries - will need to implement policies that feature services (including tradable services) more prominently; they will also need to adjust their investment in human capital. Whether this amounts to removing the bottom rungs on the ladder of development remains to be seen. The relatively unconventional growth pattern in India, with its early emphasis on services, may hold important lessons.

In any case, the developing countries - and especially the emerging economies - clearly have a lot on their plates. As these economies add items - protecting themselves from volatility, countering unfavorable external conditions, and adapting to powerful technological trends - to their core structural growth agendas, they will invariably make mistakes, and even stumble. This will produce high variance in performance across countries and probably reduce the average pace of convergence. But it will not, in my estimation, derail convergence completely. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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