

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

Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

May 13, 2019

Afghan Women Play Significant Role in Social and Political Arenas

The rights and freedoms of women have been a highly controversial issue in Afghanistan, mainly following the downfall of the Taliban's regime. This issue makes the national headlines with breaking news about the Taliban's return in case of reaching an agreement with Kabul government and its US ally as a result of peace talks. Besides reiterating women's inclusion in peace talks, a US senator Jeanne Shaheen said, "They don't want to go back to that time when women's couldn't work, when there was no freedom of movement, when girls couldn't go to school. That is not a future stable Afghanistan".

As a result of Afghanistan's political upheavals, the rights and freedoms of women underwent many ups and downs. Women were supported and their social, political, and economic role was extended during Amanullah's Khan's kingdom, last decade of Zahir Shah's kingdom, and the communist regime of the Soviet Union. However, their rights and freedoms were curtailed during the rules of many other kings as well as Mujahidin and Taliban's regimes.

In the post-Taliban Afghanistan, women have proved their abilities and capabilities through playing key role in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres across the country. That is, their role is as constructive as their male counterparts, especially in political arena. Currently, women are serving as MPs, ministers, ambassadors, heads of Human Rights Independent Commission, Independent Election Commission, Independent Election Complaint Commission, etc. They are also serving in Afghanistan's military and police forces.

Afghan women are trying to break the chains of culturally traditional taboos through their engagement in singing and dancing, advocate freedoms through their involvement in media and press, and pushing for peace and stability through their role in High Peace Council (HPC). With this in mind, Pierre Mayaudon, Ambassador and Head of European Union Delegation in Afghanistan, is cited as saying, "Peace agreement where women are massively part of the negotiating process, have 40 percent more chance of success than those where women are absent". It indicates that Afghan women are able to play an essential role in peace process, too, if they are not marginalized in the negotiation.

Despite the aforementioned facts, violence against women still continues in Afghanistan. For example, a prominent former television journalist Mena Mangal was killed in Kabul. Reports say that she was waiting for a car on Saturday morning when unknown gunmen shot her to death.

In tribal belts, the level of restrictions and violence against women are higher. Tribal councils are believed to play very destructive role in villages as they prefer their own traditional code of conduct to the country's democratic constitution. Afghanistan's tribal code of conduct is deeply embedded in the tradition of some tribal belts, mainly Pashtun-dominated areas, and restrict the rights and freedoms of women to a great extent, which is contrary to Afghan Constitution and even Islamic tenets. Women are still treated as inferior to their male counterparts and their role is restricted within the four walls of home on the basis of tribal code.

The presence of the Taliban and other radical individuals in tribal areas have compounded violence against women. The Taliban still conduct desert courts in their dominated areas, which is against country's constitution.

It is self-explanatory that eliminating the deeply imbedded tribal traditions in Afghanistan is not possible overnight. Afghanistan's constitution is not implemented in villages in particular. A number of those individuals, especially tribal elders, who grew up in tribal areas still do not accept the Constitution since they were fed with parochial mindset. To mitigate violence against women, Afghan government has to enforce the constitution and other national laws across the country, including tribal areas. The government should desensitize democratic values in villages through spreading awareness and including items from constitution and democratic principles in school syllabi.

Meanwhile, democratic principles and equal rights and freedoms of men and women should never be bargained at peace table. The Taliban's radical attitude towards women is no more acceptable to Afghan people.

EU's support in the empowerment of women is very crucial for Afghans. That is, when there is EU's support behind, Afghan government will be able to talk from a position of higher confidence in terms of women's rights and democratic principles with the Taliban. Meanwhile, the government can plan better mechanism for eliminating violence against women with consultation with its European ally.

Moreover, Afghan clerics are able to play a crucial role in reducing violence against women through enlightening the rights of women from an open point of view. They have to preach respect and kindness to women, as emphasized in Islam, and the practice upon both true Islamic tenets and democratic constitution, in the approval of which clerics played significant role.

Controversy over Delay in Announcing Kabul Election Results

By: Moh Zahir Akbari

On Saturday, dozens of protesting candidates and their supporters launched a protest near the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of the Parliament, preventing the new lawmakers to enter the house, where they were expected to elect the administrative board and the speaker. They emphasized that they would not allow the Wolesi Jirga's internal election to be held until the announcement of final results of the Kabul election. The protesting candidates also said they have succeeded to win a seat in the parliament from Kabul based on the preliminary results announced on October 20 but according to the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, the results have been rejected and are under assessment by the commissions.

They stressed any decisions in the absence of Kabul representatives is neither acceptable nor legal. Shinkai Karokhail a protesting candidate from Kabul said that the parliament should not launch its sessions or election of administrative board in the absence of Kabul representatives. "The result of Kabul elections must be announced as soon as possible and the election of the administrative board should be suspended," Karokhail said as quoted. "We are calling on the President, the Chief Executive, and both electoral bodies to announce the final result of Kabul parliamentary elections," said Hafizullah Jalili, a protesting candidate from Kabul. "It will be a violation of the law if the administrative board is elected by 217 lawmakers in absence of 33 legislators from Kabul," as quoted said Zuhra Nawrozi, another protesting candidate from Kabul.

In response to these, the Officials from the election commissions said the assessment of the Kabul votes is underway and that it will be finalized in the near future. They also said that the result it was supposed to be announced on Friday but it was delayed due to some technical problems. "I cannot say an exact time but we hope that we will finish it by tomorrow" said Mohammad Hanif Danishyar, member of the Independent Election Commission. Recently, IECC had said that 20 percent result sheets of Kabul parliamentary elections were missing and the electoral commissions were unable to find a solution to the problem. So far, the electoral complaints commission has assessed 80 percent of Kabul votes which were included in 2,500 result sheets. More than four million people voted in parliamentary elections in the country on October 20 2018. At least one-quarter of the votes is belonged to Kabul.

Given the performance of previous commissions and repeated procrastination of current commissions, it seems that the candidates and people objection is righteous because, at least, seven months has passed from the election but the results of Kabul have not yet been announced. This delay is not justifiable soon as possible the Kabul election results should be announced so that the parliament, which has lasted about four years illegally, has to be completed upon completion of its members. Although the parliament has recently been reopened with the presence of new representatives, its

members are still incomplete because of Kabul representatives. If we add the representatives of Ghazni province to the number of Kabul representatives, this defect will be deeper and larger. On the other hand, the new parliament was inaugurated on April 16, but so far the lawmakers have held only one session which turned controversial due to the absence of Kabul MPs.

In many provinces, the votes were overtly increased or decreased and it is somewhat clear but the electoral commissions did not have a clear answer to the protesters. During the past months, several protests were ongoing in different provinces which no one adequately address their problems. The protesters released variety of evidences through National T.Vs and social media networks which showed clear fraud. Comparison of these documents with information provided by the election commission on the website of the commission indicates that there is a clear discrepancy between the documents provided and the information available on the website of the Commission. Unfortunately, neither these commissions and nor the former Commissioners have properly investigated the issues. One week ago we witnessed an angry protest in Baghlan province, and the protests are continuing in some cities, including Kabul.

The electoral commissions should try to hear these complaints and provide logical responses to the issues; otherwise, it will leave negative impact on the future elections. We will soon have presidential elections, provincial council elections, district councils and parliamentary elections in Ghazni province. If the electoral commissions cannot answer to the questions and doubts, these doubts will undoubtedly transit to the next elections, and then no one will be able to restore the credibility of election process in the country. Given the critical stage that our electoral commissions are facing, some of the programs need to be carefully engineered and aligned with public opinion and will of the people. Or else, in addition to creating distrust on election process in the country, the current members of the commission may experience very bitter experience than previous members of these commissions.

Unfortunately, our electoral commissions have received bad legacy and experience from the past that have never gained public satisfaction. During the past eighteen years of the election, elections have increasingly been ambiguous and doubtful, and their results have always been accepted in a series of doubts. All these bitter legacies make the election commissions carry heavy burdens and challenges. The only element that can reduce this burden is ensuring transparency and fairness of elections. This is the greatest demand of people, and this demand is possible when members of the electoral commissions keep distance from political pressures and political faction.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Putting Growth in its Place

By: Jim O'Neill

After leaving Goldman Sachs in May 2013, I had the privilege of chairing an independent City Growth Commission to study the geographical imbalances of the British economy. Our task was to determine why London and the southeast had become so dominant, and how the economic performance of other major urban centers might be improved.

Our most important conclusion was that key Northern English cities were close enough to be united into a single market similar in size to that of the London metropolitan area. If the economic and commercial agglomeration we envisioned could be realized, the United Kingdom would become home to not one but two globally competitive city-based commercial hubs. Crucially, what came to be called the northern powerhouse model was designed in such a way as to complement London, rather than undercut it through competition. The goal was both to restore geographic balance and raise the UK's overall growth performance.

After then-Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne adopted the plan in June 2014, I joined Prime Minister David Cameron's government to help manage its implementation. But, owing to the Brexit referendum in June 2016, both men left government by the next month, and by September, I had left, too. Still, I have been able to keep tabs on the plan's progress as the vice chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, a non-governmental organization launched by Osborne in the fall of 2016.

Since then, the conventional narrative about the northern powerhouse is that it has lost momentum. In light of the ongoing Brexit chaos, there can be little doubt that it - along with pretty much everything else - has fallen down the government's policy agenda. But that does not mean it has been forgotten. Just last month, Osborne's successor, Phillip Hammond, indicated that he would sign off on £39 billion (\$51 billion) in funding for a Northern Powerhouse Rail initiative. By reducing travel and shipping times between the major northern towns and cities, the project promises to boost the region's productivity and advance the original goal of the northern-powerhouse plan.

Ever since chairing the City Growth Commission, I have believed that it is more important to frame productivity-enhancing policies in terms of geographic location than in terms of specific industries or sectors. No one can know what business sector will be ascendant in the future; few could have predicted just 25 years ago that Amazon and Apple would command the positions they do.

But places such as towns, cities, and regions will never disappear, even if they can and do fall into despair.

Fortunately, a growing chorus of credible commentators and experts is now also focusing on the importance of physical places in ensuring the sustainability of contemporary capitalism. Chief among them are the University of Oxford's Paul Collier, one of the world's leading voices in development economics, and Raghuram G. Rajan, a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. It is my profound hope that their advocacy for place- and community-centered economic and social policies will influence policymakers.

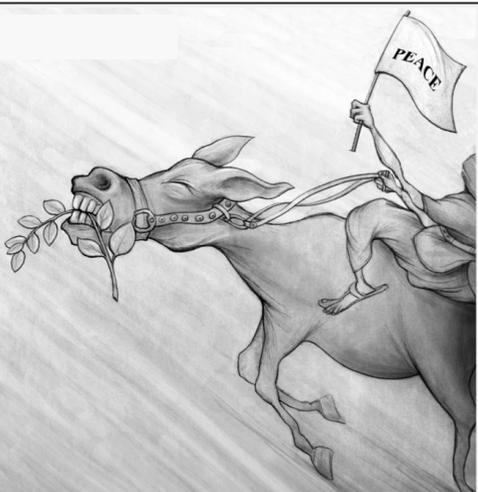
As for the original northern powerhouse, there is evidence of modest progress. To be sure, London has performed better than northern areas over the past decade, as purchasing managers' indices (PMI) for London, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West show. Moreover, many economic observers assume that London will be more resilient to the effects of Brexit than the country's manufacturing-heavy regions will be.

But now consider the same PMI data in the narrow context of the past five years, and particularly the past three. The other regions have begun to outperform London, with the North West performing especially well, and with Yorkshire widening an already positive outperformance gap.

Some of this divergence is due to London itself slipping, most likely owing to its weakening property market and the cooling investment environment brought on by Brexit. Nonetheless, the regions associated with the northern powerhouse are showing persistent strength, and the PMI data are further supported by anecdotal evidence and other regional economic statistics, such as housing prices in the last few years.

These trends may prove incidental and fleeting. But there is reason to think that they are indicative of a deeper structural change following the modest devolution and development policies adopted by Westminster between 2015 and 2017. If the government is genuinely committed to investing in the Northern Powerhouse Rail initiative, it could add significant momentum to the current progress, mobilizing - literally and figuratively - the animal spirits of northern businesses, civic leaders, and citizens.

Jim O'Neill, a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK Treasury Minister, is Chair of Chatham House.

Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net

افغانستان
The Daily Afghanistan News

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.