

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



November 11, 2017

Saffron Production on Rise

Afghanistan's saffron is considered to be the best in the world because of its taste and aroma. It is important that Afghanistan must take advantage of it as much as possible. The only way it can turn into a fortune-changing crop for Afghanistan is that it must be promoted in every possible way. There should be serious efforts to increase its production and, at the same time, there must be ways and means to promote its marketing and export. Moreover, every effort that is being taken for increasing its cultivation must be supported by government and business community.

In one of such efforts, the cultivation and production of saffron have been highly promoted in Herat province. As per the statement by local officials in the province, there has been a considerable rise in saffron production in the province this year.

The provincial Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock director Abdul Saboor Rahmani has said in a recent statement that saffron has been cultivated in 3,000 hectares of land in the province, which will result in large scale production and would ultimately result in improving the saffron business in the country. It is also important to note that the saffron production and trade have provided job opportunities to, at least, 18,000 women in the province.

If there are efforts to promote saffron cultivation in other parts of the country, there are possibilities that it can become one of our major exports. Since the demand of Afghan saffron is high and the country can charge considerable price for its export, in the long run, it can support Afghan economy to a large extent.

Though Afghanistan is largely dependent on agriculture, insufficient attention and funds have incapacitated the sector to a large extent. Therefore, it can be said that saffron is a ray of hope and the relevant authorities and the farmers themselves must concentrate on making it a major agricultural production.

In addition, it should also be noted that saffron can help us in some other ways as well. It can be used as an alternative crop to discourage poppy cultivation in the country that has been influencing our country in various ways. It has not only given us the evil of drug addiction that is taking the lives of many Afghan youth but has also strengthened the terrorism and terrorist networks as most of the Taliban terrorists receive their funding from poppy business.

It is important to understand that one of the best ways to control poppy is to motivate the farmers not to grow the poppy crops from the very beginning. Motivating farmers and landlords to grow saffron as an alternative crop can be one of the best solutions as it is practicable and may bring the farmers and landlords profit as well.

Saffron has different advantages as compared to poppy cultivation and among them the most important one is that it does not bring harm to human life, it is legal and does not go against the teachings of Islam. It is one of those crops that have the capability to be grown in dry environment. Moreover, it does not need much irrigation as well. Simple irrigation two or three times a year would do the trick; in that sense, it is draught resistant. Poppy cultivation, in contrast, would require an extensive irrigation plan - six times a year.

Saffron has different uses and, in fact, makes life healthier. The common use of saffron can be found in adding flavor to dishes, preparing different types of medicines, hot drinks, appetizers and perfumes. Moreover, it has high demand in the international market as well.

According to market studies, regionally the price of saffron is around USD 5,000; while the international price may even reach to USD 7,000. This shows that it is very lucrative and can be used as one of the basic exports of Afghanistan.

It is also important to mention that the demand for saffron is very high both in regional and international markets.

What Afghan authorities and people require in this regard is proper implementations of their policies to change the scenario. It is true that the producers of drugs have stronghold in our country, but unshakable decision both by government authorities and Afghan people can defeat them. If Afghan authorities are really interested in making saffron as the leading export of the country and controlling the menace of drugs and stopping it from financing terrorism and bringing sufferings and death to common Afghan people through addiction, it has to launch a comprehensive strategy for the growth, production and proper export of saffron.

In addition, it must not be forgotten that the country will have to stand on its own as far as the economic stability and growth is concerned. Developing the cultivation and trade of saffron can support it in that regard to an unimaginable extent.



Superstition Rules Societies

By Hujjatullah Zia

Superstition holds strong sway in human societies. People show tendency in myth and legend. They believe in baseless and deceptive statements. Superstitions have continued from primitive societies up to now. In the past, the masses were highly superstitious and tended to misconstrue an event. In modern societies, superstitions have reduced remarkably but did not come to an end.

Many kinds of superstitions rule human societies. Superstition has no rational basis and it is often in conflict with religious tenets, too. Despite being contrary to religious principles, many superstitions have been brushed with the color of sanctity. For example, some baseless issues are attributed to religion, mainly in traditional societies, to gain the approval of the masses. Take Afghanistan, a number of individuals, who lack rudimentary knowledge about religion except for some, read the palm of the masses or write talisman to forecast their future or ameliorate their life affairs.

In Afghanistan, women are more superstitious than men since they most often refer to talisman-writers while encountering a minor problem in their life and spend a great amount of money in this way.

Superstition prevails strongly in Afghanistan, especially in remote areas. I do remember when scores of women visited a pilgrim in Ghazni province to have their diseases cured. They believed that they were afflicted by magic or fairy and genie infiltrated their souls. There are many people who meet mullahs or go to pilgrims to have their illness cured rather than going to doctor. In pilgrims they seek miracles. It is worth saying that many graves of simple individuals, who were well-reputed in the society, have turned to public pilgrims. Those who are afflicted, sacrifice animals in those graves to have their problems resolved. Even when women dream good things, they construe their dreams as good luck and hope that their problems will be ended soon.

Superstitions are different from one province to another in Afghanistan. Generally speaking, when a person takes a trip, members of their family throw water after them to wish them safe trip. Mostly, taking trip on Fridays is deemed sinister. Moreover, seeing a fox on the way to trip is blessing; whereas seeing a hare is ominous, visiting a patient on Wednesday is not a right thing, etc.

After all, Afghan officials who are expected to be open-minded are also superstitious. Afghans will remember when number 39 changed into a controversial issue among MPs and everyone refused to sit on the chair that was numbered 39. In Herat province, no one tends to live in a block which is numbered 39 or drive a car with the same plate number. This number is considered an infamy and dishonor. This super-

stition has reportedly caused a serious financial harm to the government since people do not buy the blocks with number 39. It is believed that superstition is a social issue and will affect society and culture. The masses will fall prey to superstitions and mythology.

In a superstitious community, culture and social norms will also be based on superstitions and people have to obey it. In other words, superstition will affect culture similar to traditional custom - which dominated our culture to a great extent. Mixing culture with superstition will lead to horrible consequences. As it was mentioned before, people will visit pilgrims and pay for talisman for their cure rather than visiting doctors and spending in the right way.

Worst of all, a number of women resort to talisman and magical power to harm their opponents, next-door neighbors, etc. or create dislike between spouses and discord within families. Whether this work or not, some women are suspicious of the evil intention of their neighbors, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and so on.

In case of feeling ill, they simply think that someone has harmed them through magical power or talisman. Hence, superstition creates discord between families.

To view the history, superstition ruled human societies centuries ago. Natural disasters were interpreted as the wrath of nature and people sacrificed either human beings or animals to subside the nature's wrath. For demanding rain from deity, people also sacrificed animals. In Arab peninsula, a cow was burnt alive for demanding rain.

When the cow rained and moored with her burnt body, it was likened to flash and lightning and believed that it would rain. Moreover, kings also capitalized on society's simplicity and introduced themselves as God's caliph. When kings were cruel, it was said that it was people's sin and they had to atone for their sin under cruel kings.

Superstition is most likely to have reduced but not ended. We encounter many kinds of superstitions in our daily life. I believe that older women are more superstitious, especially in Afghanistan, than others.

They lived in earlier past and the past superstitions were handed down to them. Now they convey the same frames of mind to their grandchildren.

Human societies have to campaign against superstitions which have no rational or logical bases. Individuals have to ponder over it and realize that there is no relation between their fate and objects. Indeed, objects do not have the power to harm them but if they believe in this issue, it will affect them psychologically.

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Toward a People-Centered ASEAN Community

By Jae-in Moon

I am delighted that my first meeting with the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations comes at a historic moment: the 50th anniversary of ASEAN's founding. During those 50 years, not only my country, the Republic of Korea, but almost all of Asia has been utterly transformed. ASEAN's role in harnessing and spreading economic dynamism has been essential to the region's success.

For Korea, ASEAN has undoubtedly been a special and valued friend. Last year alone, some six million Koreans visited ASEAN member states, both as tourists and for business. Approximately 500,000 citizens of ASEAN member states now live and work in Korea, while roughly 300,000 Koreans live and work in ASEAN countries.

This is one example of why Korea's ties with ASEAN are more than just intergovernmental relations. Our relationship is deepened in the most personal way possible, through the intertwining of so many individuals' lives.

This fact should not surprise anyone. ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which was endorsed by ASEAN leaders at their 27th Summit in November 2015, states that the group strives to be a "people-centered, people-oriented community" that seeks to build a caring and sharing society which is inclusive and where the well-being, livelihood, and welfare of the people are enhanced.

"People first" has been my longstanding political philosophy as well, and it is a vision in line with the spirit of Korea's "candlelight revolution" that lit and heated up the winter in Korea a year ago. Korea and ASEAN share a common philosophy that values people, and that shared outlook will set the path that Korea and ASEAN take together in the years and decades ahead. Since 2010, Korea and ASEAN have made significant strides together as strategic partners. Korea-ASEAN cooperation so far, however, has remained focused mainly on government-led collaboration in political, security, and economic affairs. I intend to help advance Korea-ASEAN relations while placing a high priority on the "people" - both Koreans and the people of ASEAN. My vision is to create, in cooperation with ASEAN, a "peace-loving, people-centered community where all members are better off together." This can be summed up in "three Ps": People, Prosperity, and Peace.

To realize this vision, I will pursue "people-centered diplomacy." So, from this point onward, cooperation between Korea and ASEAN will be developed in a way that respects public opinion among all of the peoples of our association, gains their support, and invites their hands-on participation. To this end, and in commemoration of ASEAN's 50th anniversary, we have designated this year as "Korea-ASEAN Cultural Exchange Year," and actively promoted various cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Last September, the ASEAN Culture House (ACH) opened in Korea's southern port city

of Busan. The ACH is the first of its kind to be opened in an ASEAN dialogue partner country, and it is expected to serve as a hub for cultural and people-to-people exchanges between Korea and ASEAN members. The Korean government will spare no effort to expand these exchanges, especially among the young people who will lead Korea-ASEAN relations in the future.

We should also work to build a community of peace where people are safe. In Asia, we all are facing the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles, as well as non-traditional security threats, including terrorism, violent extremism, and cyber-attacks on our businesses, our social and civic infrastructure, and our official institutions. The Korean government will strive to ensure that both Koreans and the people of ASEAN are able to lead happy and safe lives, which means cooperating with all ASEAN member states, at both the bilateral and multilateral level, to overcome the security challenges that we jointly face.

Finally, I will endeavor to promote greater mutual prosperity, which benefits citizens of both ASEAN and Korea. To ensure the sustainability of people-centered cooperation, all countries in the region must grow and develop together. Creating a structure for mutual prosperity requires lowering regional and transnational barriers to facilitate the flow of goods and promote people-to-people interactions. In short, ASEAN's dynamism must now be tied to its inclusiveness.

That is why Korea will actively support the "Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025" and "Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan," both of which call for enhancing the connectivity between ASEAN economies and citizens. We will also accelerate the pace of negotiations for the further liberalization of a Korea-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in order to pave the way for freer and more inclusive growth in the region.

Korea is now preparing for yet another "hot" winter: the PyeongChang Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, to be held in February 2018. Our preparations are focused on ensuring that these Games deliver a message of reconciliation, peace, mutual understanding, and cooperation throughout the world. I happily invite you all to discover a peaceful and joyous winter in PyeongChang, and experience the dynamism sweeping through Korea and ASEAN. Don't miss an opportunity to find out and enjoy what Korea and ASEAN share in common.

[Note for editors:] ASEAN is a regional grouping comprising ten Southeast Asian countries including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Republic of Korea is a "dialogue partner" to ASEAN and enjoys strategic partnership relations with ASEAN. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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