

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



October 25, 2015

Importance of Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Relations!

According to media reports, trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has dropped more than 40% in last three months. In this calculation, goods exported to Pakistan from Afghanistan make a small portion of this trade while majority of this trade includes of goods imported to our country from Pakistan.

Having a look at the worsening economic conditions in the country, the above statistics make quite sense. It is a sad fact that Afghanistan is in difficult situation both from imports and exports point of view. Due to lack or absence of local production, we depend on other nations for meeting the needs of citizens inside the country. In this way, billions of dollars drain out of the economy every year. Similarly, we have very limited import including of dry and fresh fruits, gemstones, saffron, carpets and some other goods.

Our exported goods are sent to our neighboring countries (especially the fresh fruits as they are close to us) and a number of other countries like USA and European nations. We import goods from a number of nations but most prominent of our trading partners are Pakistan, Iran, China, USA and a number of other countries. Among these nations, Pakistan, China and Iran are the most suitable for us due to a number of reasons. First, these countries are our neighbors so we can easily access them via roads and bringing and sending goods are economical comparing to other trading partners of Afghanistan. Due to cheap labor and factors of production, the goods of these countries are cheaper. Then, we can easily get the urgently needed goods like fruits, vegetables and medicine from our neighboring countries in a short period of time. Due to the loose system of customs and others, bringing goods from Pakistan and Iran is also cheaper. Goods worth of millions of dollars are also smuggled from these countries due to which the prices of these goods are lower. If we had to import the similar goods from USA or European nations, majority of our citizens could have not afforded these goods.

Keeping in view all these facts, it must be understood that trade with our neighboring nations especially Pakistan is important. However, the trade relations between the two nations are greatly affected by the fluctuating political relations between the two countries. When the unity government was established in the country, President Ashraf Ghani visited Pakistan and emphasized for the expansion of trade relations between the two countries. However, during the repetitive bomb blasts in Kabul in August and then the fall of Kunduz to Taliban badly deteriorated political and trade relations between the two countries. When the Kabul was resounding with bomb explosions one after the other, the anti-Pakistan blame game also got heated up and many politicians, political experts and others demanded that Pakistani products should be boycotted and not allowed into Afghanistan. At that time of sentimental frenzy, nobody dared to talk against this demand. In this connection, the provincial government in Balkh province actually banned the entry of all the Pakistani goods into the province. In the same way, the reaction against trade relations with Pakistani and Pakistani goods was intense and had negative impacts on overall trade capacity between the two nations.

At that time as well, a common Afghan businessperson was not happy of the boycott of Pakistani goods. Similarly, all the shopkeepers in Kabul and other cities and towns of the country were concerned about the supply and prices of large numbers of commodities to their shops as boycott was going to affect their sales negatively. As feared, boycott of Pakistani goods resulted in the sudden rise in the prices of different commodities. Most of the kitchen items and daily consumption goods are imported from Pakistani and when their prices increased, it directly affected the lower and middle class Afghans. When the prices rose, the purchasing power of a common person also decreased resulting in the sharp decline in the sales of shopkeepers. This in turn, resulted in the decrease in the size of business activities in the country.

Keeping aside all the political differences and controversies with Pakistan, trade relations with Pakistan needs to be dealt quite sensibly, where the calculation of gain and loss should be preferred to mere sentimental statements. In international politics as well, two politically different nations may have good trade relations as it is in the best benefit of their economies and in return, greatly benefit the public. Although China and USA have opposing political viewpoints but they have trade relations of trillions of dollars as these relations are in the best benefit of their citizens.

Unfortunately, many politicians and political analysts or journalists forget the gains of a common shopkeeper or the buyers of lower and middle classes when they talk against the trade relations of two countries. We have all the rights to lodge our complaints against Pakistani policies on the political platform but when it comes to the trade relations, we should not forget the gains of common Afghans. According to Afghan businesspersons and shopkeepers, the boycott of Pakistani products was a grave mistake and it gave a hard blow to already suffering economy of our country. However, in any future day, we must be careful regarding our attitude and decisions about trade relations with any neighbouring countries and give preference to the comfort and gains of our common citizens.

Ashura, the Redemption of Freedom

By Hujjatullah Zia

Ashura, the 10th of Muharram, marks the day that Imam Husain (A.S.) along with his 72 companions, embraced martyrdom in the blazing desert of Karbala for reviving the religious beliefs, humanity and ethical code. He revolted against the despotic regime of Yazid, rather than agreeing to a humiliating pledge of allegiance. He affirmed, "To die in glory is far more honorable than to live in humiliation." Left with two choices namely death or allegiance, he chose the glory of death. Today many Muslims around the globe are commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husain (A.S.) who is to be regarded, without any dispute, as the champion of freedom. This episode is often called the tragedy of Karbala. However, it would be better to be called the "the redemption of freedom". From a higher perspective, it is sad to classify the sacrifice of Imam Husain (A.S.) as mere tragedy, for such classification would keep the divine message of Imam's sacrifice within the context of tears and emotions. Furthermore, it may render this universal human revolution into sensational event devoid from any real purpose. Consequently, this would compromise its main goals and objectives and that is to uphold the principles of justice and love. The overwhelming level of love and emotions which are displayed by the Muslim during Muharram annually are admired. However they must be very aware of the danger of their current emotional approach and the corrupted traditions of the event, towards the Imam's martyrdom. There is too much emphasis on the physical aspect of the battle and very little attention towards the true purpose of Imam's universal message of peace and love and humanity. The relentless and perpetual talks of the details of the mutilations of Imam Husain (A.S.) and the martyrs of Karbala in essence represent a mutilation of the entire message of Imam Husain (A.S.).

Imam Husain (A.S.) intended to free human societies from the clutch of cruelty and dictatorship. He injected a sense of valor and fearlessness into hibernated community of his time - and his movement transcended the particular time and location. His movement represented that sometimes only drops of blood will be a panacea for social problems - as his blood prevented from the erosion of religious tenets and moral principles. Moreover, Imam Husain's (A.S.) epic movement upheld the rights and dignity of the public. Life was cheap and one could not breathe a word despite the prevalent evils. The Sultan, Yazid, paid no heed to social mores and violation of rights was the daily practices. Those who had a share in the regime enjoyed a

luxury life at the cost of people's life and dignity. Imam broke the silence and raised his voice against the status quo. He said that an honorable death was far more admirable than a humiliated life. So, he chose death not only to get rid of disgraced life but also to breathe life into humanity and ethical values. Besides mourning over the tragic scene of Ashura and flagellating ourselves to commemorate Imam Husain's (A.S.) martyrdom as religious rituals, we have to practice his words and acts in our collective life. The Muharram ceremony should be held without any extremes or irrational deeds to avoid deviance or sparking violence. In other words, we have to amend our culture according to Imam's words and intention. For instance, the clergy believe that flagellating oneself with knives to mourn over Karbala's tragedy is considered taboo. Additionally, it will mirror a violent culture to the world and triggers a sense of hatred. So, it would be far rational to donate blood to the wounded civilians and soldiers, as some people do, and institutionalize it as a culture in the holy month of Muharram.

One of the philosophies behind Imam's revolution was to amend cultural norms and social mores. He revolted when the humanity was on the verge of erosion and his words fell on deaf ears. In such a critical time, he had no recourse but to resort to sword and let his blood stream in the pages of history to convey his human message to the next generations.

Imam Husain (A.S.) was martyred neither to force ineffective tears in a number of eyes nor to have some weep over his wounds but to have them follow his path and practices. Today, the philosophic and practical aspects of Karbala's historical episode are more essential for our society than the tragic aspect. In another item, the tragedy of Karbala must not outweigh its message and goal and a surge of emotional feelings should not put our rationality under question. Commemorating Muharram is tantamount to vowing to Imam Husain (A.S.) to practice upon his deeds and words, to live an honorable life i.e. a life empty of cruelties, moral corruptions and other evils.

Imam Husain's (A.S.) blood pulses through the veins of history to keep the heart of human societies beating. His revolution revitalized religious tenets, moral and cultural values and human practices. In a nutshell, he sacrificed his life to protect humanity and divine messages and to protest against the evils and devils. He preferred an honorable death to a dishonorable life as he said, "The glorious death is far more honorable than inglorious life."

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Unemployment Results in Frustration and Insecurity

By Dilawar Sherzai

The menace of unemployment is influencing Afghan society to a large extent. Though Afghanistan has a very young population, which means that it has great potentials that can support the country in development and economic growth, the country has not been able to provide job opportunities to its youngsters and thus it is not able to take advantage of this distinction.

As the country has been largely dominated by different era of disorder and instability, the socio-economic infrastructure has not been developed much and as a result the job opportunities have always been limited. Though Afghan society is an agricultural society, the sector has not been able to absorb a large number of unemployed people. Mostly the people have been engaged in agricultural activities on personal basis and the sector has not been developed into an industry on modern grounds; therefore, the ones who own lands can benefit from them while the ones who do not own such lands are bound to remain out of work.

The frustration among the youngsters regarding unemployment is increasing with each passing day and they have been depicting it in various ways. On Sunday, October 18th, dozens of youth staged a protest in the capital Kabul against the increasing unemployment. They demanded that within a week's time the concerned ministry must take actions in this regard; otherwise its gates would be closed.

The protestors shouted slogans against the menace of unemployment and they rightfully mentioned that it was one of the key reasons behind insecurity, frustration, migration and ethnic differences. They complained that the National Unity Government was not able to address the challenge of growing unemployment and shattered their hopes.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) agreed that the issue of unemployment had turned into a great challenge for the unity government. He mentioned that the decrease in foreign aid and rising insecurity had greatly hindered government's efforts to create jobs. According to statistics from National Workers Union (NWU), as many as 16 million people in the country are eligible to work, out of which three million have jobs and the remaining are jobless.

Such a scenario is really pathetic and requires immediate attention. It has to be understood that there are clear links between the increasing unemployment and rising insecurity. The people who have not been employed have mostly become the part of terrorist networks or the filthy business of narcotics, or even they have become addicted to drugs. As they do not have any other work to do or any way of making both ends meet they do not have much option but to join insurgency.

More than any other thing, government must concentrate on providing job opportunities to the educated youngsters and thus pave the way for prosperity and development. It is really unfortunate to note that the youth who should be having a constructive role in the country are now supporting the ranks of the terrorists.

It is essential for Afghanistan to create job opportunities for its population. Job opportunities would definitely enable the residents of the country to make positive use of their capabilities for betterment and development of a society. It is important to understand that a state and its population are highly dependent on each other. It is difficult to imagine any of them living separately. As the state guarantees better life opportunities for its population, the population in return must, through thinking and action, strive to make the state stronger.

However, if the job opportunities remain limited and the unemployment remains rampant, the consequences will be really severe. Though unemployment in itself is a severe problem, it is also the root of many other problems. Unemployment is basically an injustice done to a population. It is basically the unavailability of jobs when there are people who have the required qualifications to be employed for different positions. Thus it is injustice, as the qualified people do not get what they deserve - a respectable profession to join so as to use their education and knowledge.

The people who spend a lengthy process of completing their education or acquiring particular skills should be absorbed by the job industry as soon as they are ready to work. Failure to provide such an opportunity may influence those people to a great extent. They, in order to live alive, need to earn a livelihood, which is threatened by unemployment; therefore, they seek to find out other ways of earning a livelihood. In the process they either join a profession that may not be of their choice or they may join illegal ways of earning, which would damage the society to a large extent.

It is also feared that in the post withdrawal era, the country would face major economic challenges. The financial support has already started decreasing for Afghanistan. In near future one of the biggest challenges would be to create job opportunities for Afghan people. In absence of sufficient job opportunities, it would be really very difficult to maintain peace, tranquility and order. The international community and the Afghan authorities must make sure that they create enough jobs so as to save the country from falling into instability and economic crisis.

The role of economy is very much vital for a country. It, for a country, is as important as circulatory system within a human body. As without circulatory system blood cannot be pumped through different parts of the body, in the similar fashion without economy, money and other basic requirements of life cannot reach to different parts of a country. And the economic system can only be strengthened when the capable and skilled individuals participate in strengthening the economic system. Especially the youngsters who get qualified from universities must be given opportunities to present and use their skills in the profession of their choice and interest. Young blood equipped with determination and patriotism can definitely play a significant role; all they need is equitable treatment from the prevailing system. Moreover, equal job opportunities must be created for girls and women as well, as they form an integral part of Afghan populace and can play a tremendous role in improving Afghan economic system.

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