News & Comment

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Rice Imports: Colonialism and the Death of Farming

News:

The High Court of Kenya has recently lifted the government's ban on duty-free rice importation, clearing the way for traders to flood the market with cheap foreign rice. While the move might be celebrated by some as a way of lowering the cost of living, its deeper implications cannot be ignored.

Comment:

This decision is not simply about rice; rather, it is part of a much larger pattern of economic restructuring imposed upon Kenya through the dictates of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Such institutions present themselves as rescuers of struggling economies, but their so-called "solutions" are designed to dismantle local industries, cripple self-reliance, and entrench dependency. In Kenya, farming has always been the backbone of the economy. Yet, by flooding the market with cheap imports, local farmers are left unable to compete, their livelihoods destroyed, and the nation's agricultural foundation weakened.

Kenya's path under the IMF is not unique. Somalia offers a tragic example of how these policies can completely dismantle a nation's economic backbone. For centuries, Somalia's pastoral economy thrived on livestock production and trade. Pastoralists lived in dignity, self-sufficiency, and resilience. But in the 1980s and 1990s, Somalia was subjected to IMF and World Bank reforms that turned disastrous. As part of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank, Somalia was forced to dismantle the very foundations of its food and livestock economy. The regime in Somalia cut spending on vital sectors and liberalizing trade, hence stripping Somali farmers of protection, leaving them vulnerable to cheap imports and ultimately driving them into dependency.

Due to the effect of IMF Trade liberalization, food aid dumping turned Somalia from a land of self-reliance into one of chronic dependency. Poverty deepened, famine became recurrent, and dignity was stripped away as entire communities could no longer sustain themselves.

Kenya now risks walking down the same path. By allowing duty-free imports of staple foods like rice, the government is setting the stage for the destruction of its own farmers, just as Somalia's pastoralists and cultivators were abandoned to poverty. The IMF has long imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) as conditions for loans and debt servicing. These programs may seem technical, but they represent direct control and a means to exploit resources.

The effect is devastating. Just like Somalia, farmers who once fed the nation are now unable to sell their produce, despite the government's empty promises to purchase it. The reality remains: cheap imports will flood the country. A sector that provides jobs to millions and sustains entire rural communities is being intentionally weakened. This is not accidental; it is structural.

The only true alternative lies in Islam, implemented comprehensively through the Khilafah (Caliphate). Islam does not separate economics from politics, nor does it reduce the economic problem to mere figures and markets. Rather, it treats it as a human problem that must be solved. Islam provides a divine system that safeguards both livelihood and dignity. The Khilafah is obliged to guarantee that every citizen has access to food, clothing, and shelter. And this was seen in the time of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the Khalifah who ensured that no one in the state was left hungry. Wealth was so fairly distributed to the extent that zakah collectors found no one to accept it. He famously instructed: "Scatter the food on the mountain tops, so that it will not be said that animals died of hunger during my reign."

The only way out of this cycle is to reject the capitalist framework imposed by institutions like the IMF and embrace the system revealed by Allah: Islam under the Khilafah. Only then can food security, dignity, and independence be restored to the Ummah.

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