

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

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**Health Sector Should Not Remain Neglected**

One of the greatest blessings for human beings is good health. If people have good health, they have the capacity to build a better and healthy society. With the advancements in science and technology and particularly in medicine and medical facilities, human beings should have been able to control or completely eradicate many diseases. However, that has not been the case and serious issues still persist.

Mostly, it has nothing to do with the incapacity of human beings to deal with these diseases. There have been many major breakthroughs in the medical field and most of the diseases can be cured easily by the doctors, but the main issue is of sociological and political nature. Mostly, different governments in the world have not been able to form an economic and political system that should be dedicated to the service of the people. Therefore, there are many people who remain distant from modern health facilities. The health systems in many countries do not come under government's domain and they function privately; therefore, most of them remain committed to profit-generation than to providing people cheap health facilities. In certain cases, mostly in the developed countries, certain health policies have been implemented that allow government interference in some way or the other to make the health facilities cheaper for the people. Nevertheless, a comprehensive health policy that can ensure that all the people in a country can get free or cheaper health facilities remains difficult to implement in the face of growing demands for profit and technological research in the field.

The result is that there are millions of people in the world who do not have access even to rudimentary services for minor diseases. It has also given rise to an inequality that is prevalent in so many ways. The wealthy people, who can afford, have the luxury to visit doctors and acquire health facilities even in other countries. The rich people of even the most backward country can have the luxury of treatment from the latest technology and invention in the field, while the poor, everywhere, remain alien to even basic requirements of life. Afghanistan is one of the countries that are suffering from the dearth of better medical facilities for most of its people. The health facilities are not proper and most of the diseases that people suffer from stay untreated even in the large cities of the country. At the same time, the quality of services provided by government hospitals is really very low, their number is not sufficient and they are not established in most of the remote areas; therefore, most of the people do not have access to them. On the other hand private hospitals have been established that can, in no way, be afforded by the people who do not have enough food to eat.

Most of the people are compelled to go to other countries for treatment. They mostly go to the neighboring countries like India and Pakistan and, there again, they have to spend a large sum of money. Apart from the health services they avail, they have to pay for the travel expenses as well. If there are such facilities provided in the country, the people would never require to go out and would not take money out of the country as well. However, it is important to note that such facilities can only be acquired by the rich people. As the ruling class in our society can pay for those facilities they mostly do not care whether the poor people in the country can have better access to health facilities.

Such a scenario is really dreadful, and there should be serious efforts to deal with the situation. Short term projects will never solve the health issues in Afghanistan. Afghan government and the supporting nations must pursue long-term strategies to handle the issue, if they want to help the people of Afghanistan.

At the same time, corruption and lose control, regarding the quality of medicine that is sold in the country, is another major issue, which is responsible for further debilitating the health of the people instead of supporting them during their ill health.

There are many reports and studies, both national and international, that show that though millions of dollars have been poured into the health sector, there are many Afghans who have their nearest health center at a distance of several days and, unfortunately, most of pharmacies do not have professional staff.

Such a scenario is really dreadful and worth special attention; moreover, only lip service would do no good to change the scenario. Therefore, the authoritative people must take necessary measures and must curb the situation as the issue is very delicate and it is related to the lives of the people. Carelessness in this regard is a type of indirect murder.

**The Need to Establishment of Safe Working Environment for Women**

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Unfortunately, many expressions and reports indicate that women job holders and job seekers are secretly and mentally harassed, particularly sexual harassment is more common in public offices. On the other hand, it is hard for women to reveal and file a formal complaint against such harassment due to personal considerations and the question of their dignity in the community, and so women are subject to more restrictions. However, the government has made various decisions and actions, especially in terms of ratifying many legislative acts: the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Law on the Prevention of Women and Children harassment and the Strategy for Protection of Women and so on. These are all the legal documents approved to support women but the main problem is that the case of women harassment is not officially registered, even though, everyone is aware that a major part of our community are still harassed in the public arena including family, educational institutions, work places and also on the streets. This is the fact that no one can deny at all.

Therefore, the issue of women should be more highlighted as it has important values in all countries of the world. All governments are required to observe it in their own way, and this is a sign of democracy and the provision of human rights in democratic systems. Most of the countries have reflected and retained the respect and protection of women's rights and their human dignity in their legislative documents, and also predicted its implementation mechanism. Hereupon, Afghanistan has also made many efforts to protect women's rights and dignity. A large amount of money has been spent in past 18 years, yet there are daily concerns about the inappropriate situation of women in Afghanistan, especially in the government department during their formal duties and job seeking process facing with illegitimate demands.

According to women, this inhumane problem remains a major concern for women community. For this reason, international institutions have always stressed that the situation of women in Afghanistan is not desirable and they face a very fragile situation both in their individual and social life. Although women make up half of the society and have high abilities and capacities, they have less participation in various fields as they do not have adequate occupational safety. Unfortunately, the government has not much success in its efforts to eradicate the issues. However, the government has shown determination to further increase the participation of women in various social, political, economic and cultural spheres.

The positive role of women and girls are not deniable in social and economical activities. Neglecting women role and women rights will make their effective abilities disappear and their talents not flourish. Therefore, it is necessary to provide more supportive opportunities in the field of women's and girls' educational, managerial and political participation. Providing equal opportunities to women and considering their role in development of the country, will

promote human development and progress in society; while their deprivation, they will deprive the community of their ability.

To fight against violence, the protection of women's occupational security, the elimination of harassment against women and girls in the community, especially in public and private administrations, and the elimination of discrimination against them in any case, are considered to be important obligations of government. The government is responsible to pursue appropriate policy of eliminating discrimination against women. The Afghan national constitution explicitly states that "Afghan citizens, including women and men, are equally entitled to equal rights and obligation against law." In addition, the penal code, legal regulations and strategy for the protection of women's rights in the agencies, in particular the strategy of women economic rights and occupational safety and its implementation is considered necessary in various participatory fields, especially women's economic activities.

Undoubtedly, the merely written legal documents are enough and its implementing mechanism is also important and requires necessary coordination and efforts among all the relevant organs. Otherwise, the existing problems will remain challenging. Thus, proper opportunities and capacities for women in government and non-governmental agencies will not be provided. Problems in the field of education and training, employment in government and non-governmental organizations, and participation in all social and political activities of women will remain unresolved; as a result, the real freedom and safe environment for women will not be provided.

Nonetheless, the presence of women has increased in the government bodies comparing to previous years, and more than 25% of civil servants and security sectors are women while playing important role in all areas. It is expected that this participation increase with the efforts of the government and society so that they may enjoy safer environment in the future. In addition to government supports, the courage and resistance of women and girls are also important. Experience has shown if women themselves do not fight against the culture of cruelty and do not seriously react against harassment, especially sexual harassment, the unfavorable situation will never change.

It is true that women are the most vulnerable people in all human societies, especially in poor and underprivileged countries; but the determination of women and girls to defend their rights and secure their legitimate demands are important. Moreover, institutionalization of women's rights and dignity requires public endeavor and women educational empowerment. Maintaining the dignity and rights of women alongside men is definitely in the interest of society and will bring about social and human development. It is hoped the mutual efforts of government and courageous women may change the situation and we see the true freedom of women in our country.

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**Kazakhstan: Testing a 21st Century Upgrade of Faith-Driven Saudi Soft Power**

By: James M. Dorsey

A recent study of the popularity of a Saudi-inspired quietist ultra-conservative strand of Islam among Kazakh businessmen suggests that the kingdom has upgraded its faith-driven soft power campaign as part of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman's vow to promote an undefined form of moderate Islam at home and abroad.

The upgrade represents a significant departure from the kingdom's more than four-decade long, US\$100 billion campaign to globally promote ultra-conservative, anti-Shiite, anti-Iranian strands of the faith through religious, educational and cultural activities that often focused on the lower and lower middle classes.

Prince Mohammed has, since coming to office in 2015, significantly cut funding of the campaign, focusing it primarily on regions of geopolitical importance to the kingdom such as parts of Yemen and the Pakistani province of Balochistan. The upgrade retains a key pillar of the campaign that caters to the survival strategy of the Al Sauds, the kingdom's ruling family, as well as the strengthening elsewhere of autocracy and authoritarianism: the principle of absolute obedience to the ruler.

The Kazakh businessmen, like significant portions of the militia of renegade Libyan general Khalifa Belqasim Haftar that is marching on Tripoli as well as Saudi-supported Islamic scholars in Algeria, are followers of Saudi Sheikh Hadi Ben Ali Al-Madkhali.

Sheikh Al-Madkhali's father, Sheikh Rabia Al-Madkhali, is the intellectual father of a quietist strand of Salafism that projects the kingdom as the ideal for those who seek a pure Islam that has not been contaminated by non-Muslim cultural practices and secularism.

The upgrade and its influence on segments of the Kazakh business community gives Saudi Arabia an additional string in its bow in the kingdom's rivalry with Turkey for leadership of the Muslim world that is primarily fought politically and economically.

Nursultan Nazarbayev, the septuagenarian Soviet-era Kazakh communist party boss, who led Kazakhstan since independence until he resigned last month, long saw Turkey as a buffer against Russian domination of Central Asia.

Pan-Turkic sentiment in Kazakhstan, despite differences with Turkey over the continued operation of schools in the Central Asian republic by Fethullah Gulen, the exiled preacher whom Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan holds responsible for a failed military 2016 coup, and other parts of Central Asia has been fuelled by Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Central Asian leaders, including Mr. Nazarbayev, who retains significant influence despite stepping down, hope that increased Gulf investment, particularly from the United Arab Emirates, will enhance their margins of manoeuvrability in a region dominated by two behemoths, Russia and China.

As a result, Gulf investment alongside Saudi faith-driven soft power are potential players in the 21st century's Great Game, the rivalry for influence, if not dominance, of the Eurasian landmass.

The Gulf efforts take on added significance if Russian scholar Dmitry Zhelobov's prediction proves true that an alignment of Russian and Chinese interests in the Great Game could prove to be short-lived.

Mr. Zhelobov warned in a recent interview that garnered significant interest in Moscow that China was gradually establishing military bases in Central Asia to ensure that neither Russia nor the United States would be able to disrupt Chinese trade with the Middle East and Europe across the Eurasian heartland. Echoing Mr. Zhelobov, Eurasia scholar Paul Goble warned that "Moscow has given remarkably little consideration to the possibility that China will build on

its soft power in Central Asia to establish security relationships or even bases and thus accelerate the decline of Russian influence there."

The upgrade to faith-driven Saudi soft power is evident in the vehicles it employs. They no longer rely primarily on Islamic scholars working out of mosques or educational institutions funded by the kingdom. Instead, they are, for example, local businesspeople who operate their businesses on principles of Islamic law such as a ban on interest.

"In post-Soviet Central Eurasia, the Islam of the 'disinherited'...has today morphed into something approaching a prosperity theology," said Aurelie Biard, the author of the Brookings study that focusses on Kazakhstan, a country that effectively bans ultra-conservative strands of Islam.

The emerging ultra-conservative business community is as much a product of the continued appeal of Saudi-inspired or Saudi-promoted strands of Islam as it is a product of the Kazakh crackdown on ultra-conservative and militant expressions of religion.

"Saudi Arabia is the homeland of Islam, it is a desert land, but they received a bonus from Allah—oil—to help them spread the true religion. Saudi Arabia is not pure sharia, but is the closest to it," said Ilya, a US-educated Kazakh entrepreneur portrayed by Ms. Biard.

His community is populated by entrepreneurs whose Islamic practice, including the wearing of long beards and public display of religious rituals such as praying five times a day, excludes them from employment in the public sector. Kazakh law bans prayer in public buildings and gives the government a veto on what religions may or may not preach, according to Joanna Lillis, author of recently published 'Dark Shadows, Inside the Secret World of Kazakhstan.' Operating businesses ensures that the community is not dependent on charitable Saudi funding that is viewed with suspicion by the government. The businessmen's religiosity however gives them access to the Saudi market as well as Saudi commercial funding.

"Halal business...has become a vehicle for a group of economic-cum-religious entrepreneurs to engage in Salafi preaching in Kazakhstan without running afoul of legal restrictions," Ms. Biard said.

Their influence is substantial. As models of piety, they are "reshaping Kazakhstan's religious landscape and forms of communal identity in a Kazakh society that is increasingly contending with politicized religious divisions and competing visions of religious authority," she said.

Said Ilya, who won a US\$7 million Saudi contract to build a tuberculosis hospital for children: Proselytization or dawah "is dangerous now, it is forbidden by the law, but we do it anyway. As an entrepreneur, I want to lead by example, that of a rightly guided Muslim and show Islam as a way of life. I have the intention (niyya) of working for Allah through my business,"

Ilya cropped his beard and adapted his public style of prayer as a safeguard against government retribution.

His strategy and by implication that of Saudi Arabia is an adaptation of 'the march through the institutions' propagated by German left-wing leader Rudi Dutschke in the 1960s during the student protests.

"As a Salafi, you can be a partisan inside, it is hidden. You can get as close as possible to your enemies and still be a Salafi. You can work in the White House, in the Kremlin. This is the power of aqeedah (religious belief system): You can even be close to Putin and still you are a Salaf," Ilya said.

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