

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



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## Standing Firm against 'Baad'

Though there are different sorts of discrimination against women in Afghanistan, Baad is one of the practices that evidently violates the right of women as being human beings. It is a practice wherein girls or women are given for the settlement of disputes. It evidently considers girls or women to be commodity who could be given away as per the will of the men, and this practice is a characteristic of tribal society. As Afghanistan is a tribal society to a large extent, the practice of Baad is frequent in most of the villages throughout the country.

Recently, some civil society activists highlighted the issue in the capital Kabul through a sit-in. The sit-in was basically initiated by Khan Wali Adel, a young man from Paktia who was a part of the practice and witnessed it closely. He revealed that his father had given away his sisters in Baad and recently his father wanted to take girls in Baad from another tribe in compensation for killing his brothers.

This case shows how the practice is frequent within Afghan society and discriminates the rights of women without any notice. There are many such cases that never come to light and they show how indifferent the people are towards them. Such practices are now a part of the accepted culture and seem to be usual behavior.

It is really imperative to identify such practices as abnormal and discriminatory; otherwise, they would keep on persisting or would even strengthen. This really has to do with the overall behavior or thinking towards women. Women are not considered as human beings and they are not thought to be having some role or status within the society. They are no more than commodity and are thus treated in similar fashion. It is important to change this perspective otherwise it would be very difficult to stop such practices. The change in the way people perceive women is really vital and can help in changing the scenario.

Government definitely needs to divert its attentions towards such issues and needs to take initiatives that will be helpful in discouraging such actions and stopping them from happening.

The fact is that the incidents violating women rights in Afghanistan have not been stopped through effective practical steps. In fact the changes are prevalent only on the exterior while from within the Afghan society still lacks the modernity and development it needs in order to reach to a respectable position. The Afghan social structure has been vehemently dominated by religious extremism and tribal nepotism. Though these factors have affected almost everyone, women have been intensely influenced as they belong to the weaker strata of the society. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Unfortunately, these norms and doctrines have even gone to the extent of violence and have tortured women physically - mostly in the public.

It is important to note that that voices that are heard in media and the cases that are brought to media may get some attention but there are many other cases that are not brought to media because there are many women who as a result of fear never raise their voices before their voices are made completely silent. It is also unfortunate to note that those who do raise their voice do not always get justice. They are discouraged by society in such a way that they should never again try to do so. They are made examples so that others who may intend to do so must be discouraged.

In many parts of the country still the Taliban outlook about women persists, that believes that women are no more than other personal possession of the male members of the society. They can buy or sell them, use them as convenient and can discard them at their will. No one is there to object.

In addition to that, women in Afghan society, like the women in other tribal societies, are considered the honor of the family and they are bound within the chains of so called sanctity. If they disagree to follow their families they are killed through honor-killings.

It is necessary that Afghan government should take serious notice of the discrimination and violence against women. It should now be understood that unless law enforcement agencies carry out concrete measures to enact the law so as to control violence against women, it would be very difficult to control the situation within a society where women are not considered even human beings. However, at the same time it is necessary to address the root causes of the problem. It is important to bring about changes in the way the women are perceived within our society. Unless, they are considered human beings and important part of the society it is very difficult to control discrimination and violence against them.

## Prioritizing High-Quality Education

By Mehdi Rezaie

The new educational year in Afghanistan just started with the advent of the new solar calendar year. Education Minister, Hanif Balkhi, expressed his commitment to improving the education sector both in quality and quantity and ensuring uniform education system in all regions of the country. He said 1,107,000 new students, including 41 percent of them girls, would be enrolled in schools this year.

The education minister said 590 education centers, 168 seminaries, 24 schools and institutes and 11 teacher training centers would be established during the new academic year.

Quality is still sub-standard in public schools throughout the country. In recent years, there has come about a marked improvement in availability and the reach of educational opportunities to the country's children. Expanding access to primary and secondary education came on the agenda of the international community and the government of Afghanistan. Hundreds of millions of dollars were poured into the country to rebuild the destroyed educational system; thousands of schools were reconstructed or built anew throughout the country and the educational budget of the government was shored up manifold to enable recruitment of tens of thousands of teachers and provide educational material to students. As a result, millions of children, boys and girl, who could not access education before, enrolled in schools and availed primary and secondary education. Primary and secondary education, as a system, is an important and integral part of any educational system anywhere across the world. Governments, particularly in other developing countries, devote a significant share of resources to making primary and secondary education available to all children of the school-going age. "Universal Public Education" is a buzzword in many developing countries, whereby governments have made primary education compulsory for all children below a certain age. The argument is that in order to attain the goals of empowering the masses of poor and underprivileged and lifting their social and economic status, primary education is a must. In Afghanistan, education is a particularly sensitive and important social sector that requires sustained and long-term attention of the government and international community. It is needless to mention that building a better Afghanistan of tomorrow, one in which people live in peace and prosperity and the dreams of whose children are not shattered, requires educated children of today who can be responsible and wise parents of tomorrow. Even if one looks at the long-term prospects for Afghanistan in the areas of politics, war and peace, development, sustainable development, economic prosperity, having happy and successful citizens, all these critically hinge on the factor of education. The children of yesterday were brutally neglected and kept far from education and the result was decades of war, lawlessness and conflict that destroyed the country and its people when those children turned adults. If we are serious about turning a new page in the history of our country, the key again lies in educating our children of today. On other fronts too like health, development, economic prosperity and building a happy and successful society, all of them depend on whether we can provide quality education to children of Afghanistan. In the country and in recent years, there has been impressive progress in providing education to children across the country. However, formidable challenges remain that are a matter of grave concern and worry. Even if the government of Afghanistan wishes to make primary education compulsory for every child of

below the age of 12 across the country, many obstacles in the way would prevent achieving the goal.

Wars, conflicts, instability and lack of security still continue in many parts of the country which have resulted in closing down of schools and denial of basic education let alone quality education to millions of children. Hundreds of thousands of these children, male and female continue to be denied education due to lack of security and a Taliban shadow rule which prohibits "science-based education". Excruciating poverty still keeps hundreds of thousands more from completing their primary education making them drop out in search of jobs as many of them happen to be the sole breadwinners for their poor families. Child labor equals denial of education to these children.

In other safer areas where there are functioning schools and even in cities and towns such as Kabul, the quality of education provided is poor. A significant percentage of teachers have had no formal training in teaching and are unaware of even the basic pedagogical techniques and principles that a teacher is supposed to know and employ inside the classroom. The overall level of discipline and proper organization of students and teachers is low which is a drag on the educational system and discourages children from continuing their schooling. Educational and pedagogical material that can aid in education and teaching inside the classrooms is nowhere to be seen. Overall, the quality of education imparted to children in schools in many parts of the country remains poor. In the remote eastern, southern, northern and north eastern provinces, thousands of schools continue to lack buildings and classrooms where children and teachers can study in a comfortable and secure environment. The salary and pay levels of teachers remain to be low even after years of promises made by educational policy makers in the government. This has worked to discourage teachers and keep them from devoting themselves wholeheartedly to their teaching profession and students. These are some of the major problems in the way of providing primary and secondary education that is firstly of acceptable quality and secondly accessible to all children across the country. The issue of higher education and universities is altogether another issue that requires another article to be discussed. At present, focusing on education and allocating a major share of national income to this critical social sector will bring immense benefits to the country in the long run. The miraculous benefits will be seen and felt over 10 to 15 years from now if we can achieve the goals of providing universal education of high quality.

The miraculous benefits of education are because education also works as a powerful engine of social, economic and political change. Socially, a large corpus of educated adults of tomorrow can function as a strong counterbalance against militancy, terrorism, lawlessness and gun culture. Economically, well-educated citizens of tomorrow can bring economic development and prosperity since economic growth is possible only when there is a large pool of educated human resources available. Politically, well-educated citizens bring stability and progress away from the dark years of the past. In other words, in bringing peace to the country, besides soldiers and security forces, every single child sitting in a classroom, over the long term, will be an additional counter-force against militancy and extremism.

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## Militancy - an Interminable Challenge

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Taliban regime ruled Afghanistan about five years. Throughout this period, the international aid community, including the United Nations, tried with varying levels of success to ensure that the victims of the war and turmoil - ordinary Afghans trying to live their lives - received at least the minimum needed for survival. Political and security problems, in the absence of an effective government, caused frequent interruptions in the flow of humanitarian assistance, and various crises required the temporary departure of UN and non-governmental aid workers.

In the escalation of the conflict in Afghanistan following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States by Al Qaeda group, the Security Council expressed support for the efforts of the Afghan people to replace the Taliban regime, once again condemned for allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism.

In his address to a special week-long session of the General Assembly on terrorism, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "As we summon the will and the resources needed to succeed in the struggle against terrorism, we must also care for all the victims of terrorism, whether they are the direct targets or other populations who will be affected by our common effort. That is why I have launched an alert to donors about the potential need for much more generous humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan." That new alert called on the international community to provide \$584 million to meet the humanitarian needs of some 7.5 million Afghan civilians over the following six months, with particular concern to ensure adequate food supplies, especially to alleviate their problems in cold weather. Unfortunately, increasing conflict in Afghanistan, including the military response to the terrorist attacks on the US, compelled UN agencies to withdraw international staff from the country, and the flow of food and other essentials into the country was slowed or halted. As the situation unfolded, the UN continued its role in promoting dialogue among Afghan parties, aimed at establishing a broad-based, inclusive government. Moreover, the Secretary-General reappointed Lakhdar Brahimi, who had resigned two years earlier, as his Special Envoy for Afghanistan. Similarly, the "Six plus Two" group met in New York under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General, agreeing on the need for a broad-based and freely chosen Afghan government and pledging continued support for UN humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, as well as in refugee camps in neighboring States. As a first step, the Afghan Interim Authority was established. The Security Council, by resolution 2001, authorized the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the Authority maintain security in Kabul and its surrounding areas. The power was

handed to the new Interim Afghan Administration, established in Bonn and headed by Chairman Hamid Karzai. Special Representative Brahimi moved to Kabul to commence his activities in support of the new Afghan Administration. At the same time, the first of the ISAF troops were deployed, under British control.

The first milestone of the Bonn Agreement was achieved with the announcement that same day of the composition of the Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga. Under the 2001 Bonn Agreement, Afghanistan was scheduled to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 in order to replace the transitional government led by Hamid Karzai since his appointment in December 2001. Presidential election was held in 2004 and Karzai became the president of Afghanistan. As Karzai entered the office, he enjoyed strong support from Western allies, but he faced enormous challenges. Continued violence and instability and an inability to effectively build up Afghan institutions and provide basic services took its toll on his popularity at home and abroad, as did allegations of government corruption. The country was also plagued by an increase in drug-trafficking as well as by the resurgence of the Taliban - which mounted attacks frequently.

The second election was held in 2009 and was followed by weeks of political turmoil. Ultimately, Karzai again was announced as the president of Afghanistan. During his second round of presidency, terror and bloodshed continued unabated. He took to criticizing the United States in bitter terms. His strong tone caused a tension between Kabul and Washington. Karzai turned down signing security pact though it was agreed upon by Loya Jirga. He asked foreign troops to stop night raids on Afghan homes. His repeated refusal for signing Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) put him on collision course with the public. Calling Bagram a "Talib-making factory", Karzai released a number of the Taliban prisoners despite being called dangerous by the US officials - this aggravated the tension between Kabul and Washington.

Ultimately, the agreement was signed by Karzai's successor, Ashraf Ghani, just days after he took office in September 2014. People hoped to heave a sigh of relief after this approval and believed that it would bring in peace and security. However, this was no more than a flash on the pan and militancy continued unabated. The Taliban intensified their attacks which took heavy tolls on Afghan soldiers and civilians. After all, the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) deteriorated the situation. Now, people still suffer from violence and bloodshed and neither election nor BSA was a panacea for the bleeding wound of Afghan nation. Hence, the burgeoning democracy has faced great barriers from the warring factions.

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