

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



April 26, 2015

Nepal's Catastrophic Earthquake

Undeniably man has rendered hapless before monstrous natural calamities that have ever hit hard civilian population and ruined well built cities. The calamities such as cyclone, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, massive floods have turned catastrophic claiming thousands of lives. It is an absolute finding, these calamities can not be prevented, but bringing pragmatic measures into use, both human and infrastructural losses can be restrained to a maximum. Nonetheless, earthquake has been the worst most catastrophic disaster, claiming the precious lives of hundreds and thousands of people.

It was an unfortunate Saturday's morning when a powerful earthquake of at least 7.8 magnitudes rocked Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Unluckily, the earthquake struck just before noon and an aftershock measuring 6.6 hit about an hour later. Smaller aftershocks continued to ripple through the region for a number of hours. The government has declared a state of emergency in the affected areas. The hospitals were full of injured, handicapped and dead bodies. The paramedic staff ran short extending services to numerous brutally injured patients.

The earthquake ripped through many historic monuments and viewable sites. According to credible media sources, the worst damage was reported in Kathmandu, where the historic nine-storey Dharahara tower, a major tourist attraction, was among the buildings brought down. The Dharara Tower, built in 1832, had been open to visitors for the last 10 years and had a viewing balcony on its eighth floor. The historic tower built in the 19th century in Kathmandu collapsed, trapping at least 50 people, Nepalese media reported. Reportedly, the earthquake also damaged historical landmarks, including the UNESCO World Heritage temples at Basantapur Durbar Square and the Dharara tower - both of which are in Kathmandu. One can roughly estimate the earthquake wreaked the infrastructure worth of billion dollars and thousand of precious human lives, is certainly an irreparable loss.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) recorded the trivial quake struck 77 kilometres (48 miles) northwest of Kathmandu at 06:11 GMT, with walls crumbling and families racing outside their homes. USGS initially measured the quake at 7.5 magnitudes and later adjusted it to 7.8, with a depth of 15 kilometers. It said in a predictor graphic that there was a 17 percent chance the quake could claim more than 100,000 lives. Factually the area has a history of earthquakes, with a 6.8 magnitude quake that hit eastern Nepal in August 1988 killing 721 people. A magnitude 8.1 quake killed 10,700 people in Nepal and eastern India in 1934. A 1934 quake of magnitude 8.3 in the impoverished Himalayan nation killed over 8,500 people.

The massive earthquake killed more than 900 people, as it ripped through large parts of Nepal, toppling office blocks and towers in Kathmandu and triggering a deadly avalanche that hit Everest base camp. Initially, the death toll was expected to rise significantly as Kathmandu's decrepit buildings, crisscrossed by narrow alleys, are home to large families. The local officials said 10 people were killed when an avalanche buried parts of Mount Everest's base camp in Nepal where hundreds of mountaineers have gathered at the start of the annual climbing season. According to local officials, at least 876 people were known to have died in Nepal, making it the worst earthquake there in more than 80 years. The jolt of earthquake was pretty gigantic effecting the neighboring India, China and Bangladesh that likely witnessed more than two dozen people reportedly killed. It is said that at least 34 people were known to have died in India, including 23 in the eastern state of Bihar, while buildings in the capital New Delhi had to be evacuated. China's official Xinhua news agency claimed that two people, including an 83-year-old woman, were killed in the Tibet region.

Following the tragic jolt many world leaders extended their grievances with the premier and people of Nepal. Earlier, President Ashraf Ghani passed on his condolences to the victims of the disaster. He expressed deep grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives. In a message to the public his office said Ghani "offers his heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families affected by the earthquake". The people of Afghanistan are equally sympathizing with relatives of survivors of victims of Saturday's earthquake that left countless valuable lives.

Responding at the calamity the humanitarian organizations and neighboring countries have extended moral, technical and financial support to Nepali government. India dispatched two military transport planes to help with the rescue and relief efforts and there were similar offers from around the region, including Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

The earthquake measuring 7.9 magnitude left buildings collapsed, injured many and left a pall of dust over the city, witnesses said.

The quake tore through the middle of highways in the capital and also caused damage to the country's only international airport, in a potential blow to relief efforts. The airport's general manager, Birendra Prasad Shrestha, said it would remain closed "for safety reasons" at least until later in the afternoon.

At the main hospital in Kathmandu, people with broken limbs and arms were being rushed in for treatment. A Reuters reporter in Kathmandu said he had seen some buildings collapse and walls of several houses reduced to rubble.



Afghanistan-Iran Relations: The Needs and Challenges

By **Abdul Ahad Bahrami**

During President Ghani's recent visit to Tehran, Afghan and Iranian presidents stressed on their will for starting a new chapter in relations between the two countries and stepping up cooperation to deal with challenges common for both countries. The two leaders agreed on enhanced efforts by the two countries to tackle the compounding security threats posed by terrorism as well as drug production and trafficking. The two countries have also signed agreements of cooperation in other areas such as refugees and economic ties between the two countries.

The National Unity Government's efforts to improve relations with neighboring Iran is coming as a follow-up to former president Hamid Karzai's visit to Tehran in 2013. During his visit to Tehran, former president Hamid Karzai and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani agreed to start negotiations for signing a bilateral cooperation agreement between Iran and Afghanistan. Karzai's attempts to reach an agreement of bilateral cooperation with Iran, while he was refusing to sign the security agreement with the United States, raised eyebrows on his misplaced diplomatic focus which was trying to develop relations with regional powers in expense of improving relations with the United States.

However, this time President Ghani's visit to Tehran did not meet any such skepticisms, rather was seen by many as late as he visited a number of regional countries at the beginning of his takeover from Karzai. After coming to power, President Ghani quickly managed to sign the bilateral security agreement with the United States, preempting any disapproval from internal and external players and preventing further delay and possible damage to the Afghanistan-US security pact. In the meantime, both Karzai administration and the National Unity Government made concrete efforts to convince regional countries such as Iran and Russia that the security deal with the US would not be a threat to anyone.

In recent months, The relations between the new government in Afghanistan and Iran was under spotlight as the Afghan president made efforts to boost relations with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who are believed to have influence over the Taliban. To this point, the move should not have been worrying for Tehran. Ashraf Ghani's move to announce his support to Saudi's stance on the Yemeni conflict was definitely something unexpected for the Iranians. In recent months, there were contemplations over a shift of foreign policy in Kabul towards Saudi Arabia as Afghanistan started fresh efforts to kick start peace negotiations with the Taliban. President Ghani's visit to Tehran seemingly helped resolving mounting distrusts from Iran to the new government in Kabul. Despite the stance on Yemen, the new government recognizes it very well that it needs to boost relations with neighboring Iran.

Despite all the ups and downs in relations, Afghanistan is well aware of its need to handle the delicate relations with powerful neighbors including Iran. With the US military presence in decline, Afghanistan is rebalancing itself to manage between direct security and economic involvement of not only Tehran and Washington but also other regional powers such as China and Russia in the country after conclusion of the NATO Afghan mission. In the post-NATO era, the Afghan

government needs to maintain rapport and a friendly relation with Iran. Iran has been one of the main supporters of Afghanistan in the last fourteen years. The Afghan government's attempt to establish friendly ties with Iran is quite imperative for Afghanistan's interests. Iran can play a role in the peace process in Afghanistan. Iran has announced its support to the Afghan peace process through regional cooperation. Regional cooperation and partnership with regional countries is a key foreign policy issue for Afghanistan as the US-led NATO forces are completing withdraw in the years to come. Iran is one of the neighboring countries that have had warm relations with Afghanistan during past decade and Tehran has provided Afghanistan with millions of aid assistance in development projects and reconstruction. Iran had close ties with Afghanistan during presidency of former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad despite Iran's deep skepticisms to US military presence in Afghanistan.

The need for cooperation

Iran and Afghanistan has many issues between the two countries which require increased cooperation between Kabul and Tehran to resolve them. Among them, the issue of refugees is of high urgency and importance for both countries. Afghanistan is still facing challenges regarding accommodating hundreds of thousands of refugees returning from Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere. This is while Pakistan and Iran have time and again tried to deport thousands of refugees by force, causing serious humanitarian situation inside for the government of Afghanistan. Migration and presence of hundreds of thousands of Afghans in Iran has remained a thorny issue in Afghanistan-Iran relations. Afghanistan is closely watching what the new government does with Afghan migrants after they were warned of being deported forcibly. In response to calls from the government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, Iran has regulated stay of Afghan refugees in the country which allows the government of Afghanistan to gradually accept and accommodate the returning refugees.

Other common challenges for both Afghanistan and Iran are the long-lasting insurgency in Afghanistan and rise of new form of extremism in the region. The two countries need direct cooperation and share of intelligence to effectively tackle insecurity particularly in border areas. During his visit to Tehran, President Ghani and Iranian president Hassan Rouhani agreed to step up efforts by two countries to deal with the emerging threats from the Islamic State group in Afghanistan. The production and trafficking of narcotics is of serious importance for Iran as the country is a main target country for drug trafficking. Without joint efforts, Afghanistan and Iran cannot deal with these menaces effectively.

On the other hand, Afghanistan has a broad trade and economic relation with Iran. In an attempt to boost foreign trade, Afghanistan needs to expand trade relations with the neighboring country. Iran's proximity to Afghanistan gives it grate advantages for having enhanced economic and trade relations. To boost trade and economic ties, Afghanistan and Iran need to build on previous reconstruction projects to expand railway and roads connectivity between the two countries and beyond.

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The Problem Lies inside the House!

By **Muhammad Rasool Shah**

The revelations of the governor of Paktika may be somehow shocking but they are not new of their kind. Almost a week ago, the said governor accused the National Security Advisor of providing money to the families of ISIS militants in the province. There has not been any public announcement in this regard by the said government office until the publication of these words. The parliament has also summoned both the governor of Paktika and the concerned officer of National Security to the floor of the house to clarify their position. Further investigation of the house would bring into the light the real situation but we cannot expect much from the house as similar hearings in past were mostly fruitless. The biggest problem is of the house itself, the members of which are continually accused of corruption and other illegal practices.

A member of the house and representative of Paktika province presented another side of the picture. According to him, the said governor has mistaken the refugees of North and South Waziristan of Pakistan for the militants of ISIS. After the Pakistani military launched a military operation in the tribal areas of Pakistan, large numbers of families from the Waziristan region of Pakistan crossed the border into Afghanistan. As a symbol of Afghan hospitality and cultural traditions, these refugees were not only given a safe place to live until peace is restored in their own places but government also provided each family with a minimum of five thousand Pakistani rupees so that they should be able to meet their expenses. The said military operation is still in progress in Pakistan and the displaced Pakistani families are still living on the Afghan soil. According to the parliamentarian, the governor might have taken the displaced families of Waziristan as belonging to ISIS and thus made this media statement. However, we may or may not be able to get the exact details of these accusations.

In past as well, there has been many similar accusations when the Afghan security forces, important officials of the government, international security forces, tribal elders or chiefs, the mafia groups, spying agencies and many others were accused of being involved in helping the militants and establishing their networks for their own objectives. Taliban are also accused of being helped by the foreign forces in form of arms and ammunitions. In the same way, the details of military operations, that were kept secret and only a few top officers knew about the exact details of the operation, were already known to the Taliban and they had already left the area before the arrival of Afghan forces. It is the reason why, a large number of officers and soldiers left the force when they discovered that they were in fact fighting an insider and not an actual enemy and figuratively, their hands were tied together. The same reason is given for the large numbers of incidents when a member of Afghan forces opened fire on the foreign forces.

Large number of foreign forces were killed or injured in these 'Green on Blue' attacks. A common Afghan also suspects foreign forces for their failure in curbing out the militancy, although having all the sophisticated technology and latest weapons.

In Kabul and other major cities of the country, a number of terrorist attacks were carried out by terrorists in the most secure and heavily guarded places where access of a terrorist is out of question. The attack on the office of the City Police Chief was an example when the terrorist was able to reach to a place that is not easily accessible even to the low-ranked officers of police. As was shown by the CC TV footages, the terrorist reached inside in a high-protocol vehicle that belonged to one of the senior officers of police force. Similarly, the ability of terrorist to strike at the most secure places of the city, after crossing all the police checkpoints, is also suspicious and gives birth to many questions. The attack on Kabul Serena Hotel was also an example when terrorists were given a help in carrying their weapons through the tight security of the hotel. The inability of police to identify and stop the terrorists at large numbers of security checkpoints inside the city shows their inability but people also suspect them as having an invisible hand with the militants.

On the other hand, police and our spying agency blames important government officials like ministers, parliamentarians and others as having hands in carrying the terrorists and their weapons to different points of the city. A number of terrorists were caught from the houses of important government officials but the case was soon buried before it reached to the media. The important officials are also accused of providing the terrorists with the exact maps and locations of different targets inside the city as in some cases, terrorists seem to be having more detailed information comparing to the concerned officers.

Outside the cities, there are large numbers of Taliban groups, working for their own masters and sponsors.

The above suspicions are supported by the fact that Taliban pay monthly salaries for their members, provide them with latest motorcycles and vehicles, have good supply of arms and ammunitions and have access to best medical facilities in one of our neighboring countries. In the presence of these facts, it no more remains a secret that there are certain hands behind these Taliban.

The new form of threat for the security of our country has emerged in the form of ISIS. As security experts have repeatedly said this that without any internal support, the existence and operations of ISIS is next to impossible in Afghanistan. If we want to finish this menace from our country, we need to cut those hands that are supporting them and making them flourish. This seems to be the only rational and permanent solution of this problem.

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