

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



August 02, 2015

Education Needs to Be Prioritized

Education is a versatile tool guaranteeing stability, social cohesion and societal uplift whilst ensuring respect for human rights. Many societal problems get regulated after education stand top most priority. The skinny budget allocated for education ridicules us as a nation and marks deep-rooted state of intellectual bankruptcy. Unless education renders preliminary requisite, success may remain a daydream. Formerly a report surfaced that unearthed three million children remain out of school across the country, despite partial improvement in the quality of education and staff capacity. This is a worrisome figure reflecting government's interest toward educational betterment. According to ministry of education in recent year, more than nine million students, 40 percent of them girls, were enrolled in schools across the country. Over 700,000 others, 60 percent of them females, attended literacy programs. It further entails 24 percent of children were still deprived of education due to lack of professional staff, closure of schools in insecure areas and other challenges. The unending state negligence depicts, a magic might reverse the notorious state Afghanistan faces at present.

Earlier an official claimed the school teachers were being recruited and appointed by the Taliban in the Shah Joy district. This worrying stance is affirmed by the serving head of the province confirming salaries of teachers were being pocketed by the Taliban as a number of insurgents have been appointed as instructors in the schools. It's outrageous to recognize the funds reserved for educational betterment in a province are flowing into the accounts of militants and local commanders who are consecutively unleashing terror plots against the innocent civilians. It is unbelievably frightening the monetary allocation for education is funding heinous crimes – education is shunned in ignorance and militancy is supported instead. Regrettably, incriminating education which undoes the fear out of the mind and heart of people is camouflaged in the constant cloud of terror and endless fear –unluckily parasitizes on its very existence.

The government whether ignorant or restrained to avert the whole state of affairs marks an in-depth negligence or criminal complicity. What about the credibility of whole statistics of ministry of education after the emergence of this report? Doesn't it reflect the statistics provided about the rest of province are also merely paper work? Will the government ensue the case of such grave fraudulence and punish the culprits devoid of their socio-political standings? There are several questions emerging in the minds of every loyal Afghan waiting to be responded –one being is how long will the masses be put to mercy of power players.

This act of betrayal is shocking to learn when public officials side the wrongs means of exploiting the public resources –it ultimately earn us disgrace and indignity. The reprehensible act is analogous to self immolation –education fundamental to collective uplift is enrooted by cutting instead of adding the resources going to this department. The minimally performing education sector is deliberately pushed to abysmal of negation. The concerned public officials instead of choosing to resign after the news got public, shamelessly sticks to defend their ill deeds. Sticking to state of constant denial, owing the responsibility of mishaps undertaken in one's realm marks an in-depth degree of incompetence whilst negating any expectancy of betterment.

It is alarming to learn the Helmand province bearing the brunt of insecurity pushing educational institutes to closure. Helmand's education officials have said over 100 schools have been closed in the province on account of security threats, with the majority of them located in the northern districts. In addition to the confirmed closures, provincial officials have said that even in the cases of schools that are remaining open, families are declining to send their children to school out of fear of security threats.

According to Helmand's Department of Education, there are a total of 385 schools in the province, with 192,000 male students and 50,000 female students. Officials say 150 schools, or 43 percent, are thought to be closed at the moment, amounting to about 100,000 students. While provincial officials say some progress was made in getting schools reopened in recent months, instability in northern Helmand is now forcing many schools to close rapidly, curtailing much of the progress previously made.

Contrary to the said data the members of civil society activists in Helmand have reported a higher number of closed schools than the one quoted by provincial officials. In each school from 500 to 2,000 students have been deprived of education, and the continuation of the situation will mean an illiterate generation ahead. Nearly 100,000 students have been unable to attend more than 100 schools where they are enrolled in southern Helmand province due to insecurity, officials say. The official said 192,000 students, including 51,000 girls, were being taught by over 3,000 teachers, including 564 female teachers, in the province.

Aside to the aforesaid facts, a glance at our deserted national priorities disheartens us of interminable irrational and abrupt priorities which happens to be mostly influential than inspirational. The undertakings executed under the influence of forged circumstances than national priorities yield not, the desired result based on national interest. Consequently the politician lost in delusion try not to revisit the grey areas of governance, consequently improvement turned an intangible target given a rational dictum for intellectual and material achievements has never been a pursuable discourse for our politician. A nation reaches to prominence, turn unbeatable and matchless, only when greater intrepid steps are taken to eliminate illiteracy by declaring the state of educational emergency. The profound significance of education in societal ascend is established and undisputed, contrary of being failed to inspire our politicians.

Can Mansoor Fill Mullah Omar's Vacuum?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The leadership of the Islamic Emirate and the family of Mullah Omar... announce that leader Mullah Omar died due to a sickness," a Pakistani newspaper has cited a Taliban official. And on Thursday, Hafiz Saeed, leader of Pakistan's religious group Jamaatud Dawa, front, led funeral prayers for Omar at a mosque in Lahore, Pakistan after the Taliban confirmed his death. Based on the report, the Taliban held meetings Wednesday night, after the reported death of Mullah Omar, and after consultation between members of the Shura Council appointed Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, a former aviation minister, as their new supreme leader.

The belated disclosure last week of Omar's death has added to the legend of the ghostlike Taliban chief, a figure so elusive that it appears to have taken U.S. spy agencies two years to determine that one of their top targets after 9/11 was no longer alive.

U.S. intelligence officials now think that Omar probably died two years later, in 2013, and Afghan officials said last week that he succumbed while being treated for a serious illness in a Karachi hospital.

Milt Bearden, a former CIA operative in Pakistan and Afghanistan, is quoted to say that "it is beyond puzzling" that Omar's death could go unconfirmed for so long, especially given the intelligence and surveillance capabilities of the United States.

But "it's another case of why intelligence collection in that part of the world is so difficult," Bearden said. "The truth is layered, and there are multiple agendas, none of which we ever really understand."

In interviews, Afghan, American and European officials offered insight into why it took so long to determine that Mullah Omar was dead: He may have been one of the world's most wanted men – he carried a \$10 million American bounty on his head – but by 2014 few people outside Afghanistan seemed to want him enough to put much effort into finding out whether he was dead or alive.

The US State Department had offered a \$10 million bounty on his head and described him as a tall male with shrapnel wound to the right eye.

Mullah Omar, along with several other Taliban leaders, was said to have fled to Quetta where they formed the "Quetta shura". Reports had also claimed that Mullah Omar had fled to Pakistan's Karachi city.

American officials said they had long ago come to believe that Mullah Omar's role in the insurgency was primarily spiritual, and that he had little to no operational control over the Taliban. In an interview last year, a former American military commander went so far

as to compare Mullah Omar to the medieval Spanish commander El Cid, whose corpse, according to legend, was suited with armor and propped up on a horse to bolster Spanish troops fighting the Moors. It is believed that Mullah Omar's role has been diminished in recent months. Therefore, the United States had said it will not target Mullah Omar and other Taliban leaders unless they posed a direct threat to the US, following the withdrawal of US forces in Afghanistan in January this year. However, the question is that who played his role in past months to keep the world in dark about his death?

Some believe that Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, Omar's previous deputy, continued his task under Omar's name to keep the militants' morale high and deceive the world's officials. The Taliban's negotiators and high-ranking officials will frown upon the sudden disclosure of Omar's death in this critical time, as progress was made in peace talk. This will trigger mistrust between Afghan-Taliban officials.

I have never been optimistic about the peace parley and insisted upon the Taliban's insincerity, in my writings. Despite the Taliban's deadly acts of terror, this also led to the death of former head of High Peace Council (HPC) Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani; Afghan officials pursued negotiation with great hope. As a result, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani expressed his gratitude to Mullah Omar on Eid Day for a statement issued under Omar's name saying that parley, not war, is a way towards peace. Now, the news of Omar's death will be a real disappointment for knowing that Taliban have been playing their old game up to now.

Omar's death marks a significant blow to the Taliban, which is threatened by the rise of the self-styled Islamic State group, the Middle East jihadist outfit that is making steady inroads in Afghanistan. With the news of his death, a larger number of the Taliban militants will pledge allegiance to the IS group. It is believed that Akhtar Mansoor does not have the charisma of Omar among the Taliban's ideologues and therefore will not carry much weight – as Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi does among his men.

Of late, Omar's insignificant role was tangible – as many Afghan Taliban proclaimed their allegiance to IS leader. Finding themselves in conflict with the IS's ideology and their aggressive approach, the Taliban's high-ranking officials gave Afghan government the green light for peace talk. I believe that Mansoor is unable to fill the vacuum of Omar and to bridge the gap between the Taliban's polarizations rather the rift will widen further.

After all, Mullah Omar's vacant seat around the table of Afghan-Taliban negotiation regarding peace was beyond our officials' imagination. To put it succinctly, the talk without Omar will not give the desired fruit, since Mansoor is unable to gain Taliban's unanimous allegiance.

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Furnishing Youth with Contemporary Resources

By Asmatyari

Childhood is the most innocent stage in a human life. It can be classified into early teen and late teenage –those in their late teens are said youth and early teens are called children. Both of them are rich asset of a nation. It is that phase of life where a child is free from all the tensions, fun-loving, play and learns new things, and is the sweetheart of all the family members. But this is only one side of the story. The other side is full of tensions and burdens. Here, the innocent child is not the sweetheart of the family members; instead he is an earning machine working the entire day in order to satisfy the needs and wants of his/her family and eventually resulting in child labor.

Child labor is one of the biggest challenges that the whole world is facing now. Child labor includes working children who are below a certain minimum age. This practice is going on since long and is one of the worst forms of child exploitation. Child labor not only causes damage to a child's physical and mental health but also keep him deprive of his basic rights to education, development and freedom. According to statistics provided by UNICEF, there are an estimated 250 million children aged 5 to 14 years employed in child labor worldwide and this figure is continuously increasing.

This evil is not only affecting under-developed and developing countries, but developed countries are also facing this though the rate is comparatively very less. Child labor in Asia accounts for the highest percentage of child labor (61%) followed by Africa (32%). According to International Labor Organization (ILO), if child labor will be banned and all children get proper education, world's total income would be raised by nearly 22% over 20 years, which accounts for more than \$4 trillion. Banning child labor will help in boosting the economy of a country.

Child labor victims in Afghanistan mostly work in illegal remote mines and other sources for at least 12 hours a day since mining a major source of income for poor families, they then force their children into it for money, food and other things. Child labour is an issue of growing concern in Afghanistan. According to recent estimates, one in four Afghan children aged seven to 14 is engaged in some form of work. This data explores why children in Afghanistan work, focusing specifically on factors that influence decision-making at the household level. Drawing on findings from an in-depth, qualitative study of poor households that use child labour as well as those that do not, this paper looks beyond poverty to explore the range of social and cultural factors in household decision-making about child labour and considers their implications for policy.

The findings were drawn from interviews with 33 poor households in both urban and rural settings Kabul province, including Kabul city and a peri-urban community in Paghman; Herat prov-

ince, including Herat city and a community near the Islam Qala border with Iran; and a rural village in Badakhshan province. In addition, researchers consulted stakeholders from the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD), national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and United Nations agencies in developing policy and programme recommendations. The decision to send children to work is influenced by a combination of factors. Poverty is an obvious contextual factor that dominates the decision-making of all households in the study. In addition, household composition and gender norms affect the availability of labour resources, which can result in the need to send children to work.

It is a great national wastage if these energetic hands and brains are not provided with some sort of work to meet the needs of the nation. What is needed is that they should be taken into confidence and given a direction –some constructive work. This massive manpower can do wonders provided its enthusiasm is harnessed for development work. Afghanistan youth have never lagged behind when called upon to meet a challenge. It is for the national leaders to play their part by mobilizing their abilities and providing them with a direction instead of letting them at the reach of extremist elements.

There can be a large number of schemes, projects and programs wherein their total involvement will bring quicker and better results. They can play a pivotal role in the socio-economic regeneration of the society. There are many evil practices in our society. If the youth is associated in a drive against these practices, the results may be much more satisfactory. There may be schemes connected with the raising of the level of production in agriculture. The youth may be assigned the job of dissemination of knowledge for better farming, new techniques and proper use of fertilizers and pesticides. What is required is that they may be given adequate training in these tasks. In a drive against economic offences, their energy may be used in molding public opinion in favor of eradication and prevention of such offences. The youth may work successfully as an arm of the administration in the implementation of governmental programs aimed at fighting against these and other maladies.

Another field wherein their energy may be gainfully employed is the task of adult education and universalisation of education. Being given a little dose of incentive encouragement and support, they may take over the great responsibility of fulfilling the targets fixed by the government. Their services may similarly be utilized for preventing and fighting offences like smuggling, black-marketing and hoarding. They can at least create public opinion against those who indulge in such unfair practices. However, in order for continuous success to take place; it is the Government's responsibility to provide the youth with proper facilities for, getting equipped with the knowledge of the modern era.

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