

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



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Corruption in Education must not be Tolerated

It is now a widely accepted fact that Afghanistan cannot survive without pursuit of modern education. A brighter and better future can only be guaranteed if Afghan children both male and female have easy access to educational institutions. Particularly, primary and secondary education is vital for the efforts to make education lead our way towards educated society. However, even after knowing the fact, the government has not been able to play any considerable role in this regard. Though, there have been efforts since the downfall of Taliban, serious issues still prevail in the sector and hinder the way for better education opportunities for Afghan children. One of the most dominating hindrances in this regard is the prevailing corruption in the sector. Previous government, though exaggerated much its performance regarding developments in education of children, was not able to achieve something worthwhile. And now there are pieces of news that suggest that many of the claims made by previous government regarding education were false.

Minister of Education, Assadullah Hanif Balkhi, said on Sunday, December 18, that as per a recent study only six million Afghan children are at school, which is contrary to the 11 million figure which was given by the former government. According to statement by Balkhi, currently up to six million children are attending 17,000 schools across the country. A total of nine million children are registered but 24 percent of them do not attend school. "Our statistics are authentic. Eleven million were not enrolled - not even on the database of the previous government. The media was given the wrong statistics," Balkhi said in his statement. Meanwhile, Sediq Patman, a former deputy minister of education said that the leadership of the education ministry exaggerated the statistics about the number of active students, possibly for certain reasons including corruption and misuse of resources. According to Patman's statement, many schools in eleven insecure provinces were closed down in the year 2007.

This is really tragic and shows the level of irresponsibility and corruption that has penetrated within our society. If the country is not able to make developments and achievements even after so much assistance and support from international organizations and international community, it is because the authorities in Afghanistan have been corrupt and have had no serious commitment and preference for education. Corruption and misstatement in education sector shows the worst form of ethical degradation and must not go unchecked.

Emphasizing on the same, Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) has called for the prosecution of officials in the previous government who released fabricated statistics. Sayed Ekram Afzali, Chairman of IWA said in a statement, "On one hand it indicates that there might have been corruption in the ministry of education. Huge amounts of money could have been embezzled through ghost schools and ghost students. On the other hand, they (education ministry officials) gave false information to the international community and portrayed the education sector as one of the more successful projects. The international community also never focused on the topic."

True justice is needed instantly in this regard. Making those accountable who provided wrong statistics, would pave the way for better developments regarding education, however that is unlikely to come. A society that does not feel guilty about the children who die of hunger, poverty and lack of rudimentary requirements, would never prioritize education for its children. And, a society, where the government authorities lie about the most important sector that will define the future of the country, is really heartbreaking.

Afghanistan is one of the countries that are highly influenced by such people who aim to block all the ways to improvement and modernization. Blinded by religious extremism and outdated tribal values, they are always ready to oppose any sort of efforts that are devoted to spread education to the people of Afghanistan, as they know that the modern education that has been spread in the country to a certain level may encourage evolution and modern changes. In particular, they are against the modern education for the females. The destiny-makers of this society know that if the girls are given modern education, they may question about their roles in rights. They may question the prejudiced rules and regulations. They may challenge the religious dogmas and in due course challenge the Mullahs and the illiterate tribal leaders. They may change the scenario and that is what the makers of the society do not want them to do. They want them to be passive and compliant, as in such state they would be easier to tackle and ruled over.

It is important that the responsible institutions and authorities realize the worth and importance of modern education and must encourage it as much as possible. Modern education is essential for Afghan society if it has to invite positive changes. Education, as a matter of fact, makes positive evolution of the society possible and embraces the new ideas and processes with open arms. The nations of the world that have given value to modern education, made it universal and have made efforts to develop their education systems on the basis of modern and scientific systems have been able to earn astonishing growth and reputation. Simultaneously they have assimilated innumerable amenities of life for their people and have made them capable of living their lives with poise and decency.

Pollution: The World Threatening Issue

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Many governments and individuals still underestimate air pollution warnings while it recognized as a biggest life threatening enemy in the planet and likely to put the biggest brake on development in the future. According to World Health Organization (WHO), there are around 3,000 cities in the world which badly affected by air pollutions. Millions of people, including rich countries, are suffering from health issues such as cancers, heart and respiratory diseases that air pollution brings, the levels of air pollution in many Asian and African cities are said to be five or even 10 times worse. As ranked by WHO, Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul are graded the ninth and tenth most polluted cities in the world while Onitsha, a fast-growing city in Nigeria, got the first place in the globe. 98% of these cities, around 92 per cent of the world's population live in places where levels exceed recommended limits. And around 6.5 million people die annually from air pollution.

In addition, the intensity of air pollution has increased by 8% in the past five years. Levels of air pollution have reached toxic stage particularly in some countries that the World Health Organization (WHO) said it has become one of the world's biggest public health issues. Toxic fumes have reached levels so dangerous that the number of annual deaths caused by air pollution across the globe is now greater than those of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and malaria combined. The quandary of toxic levels of air pollution or smog affects many of the world's major cities in the world: from Kabul to Hong Kong and Shijiazhuang in China and multiple cities in Latin America.

In late 2015, schools and offices were closed in China because of the toxic levels of smog that lasted for weeks. In December 2015, a blanket of thick gray smog covered skies in New Delhi, India. Tehran and Turkey also suffer tremendous levels of air pollution, especially during winter.

Recently, Commerce minister Humayon Rasa, Head of National Environment Protection Agency of Afghanistan, Mustafa Zahir, and Kabul Mayor Abdullah Habibzai called in the Wolesi Jirga to answer lawmakers regarding increasing of air pollution and trashes in Kabul city. Number of Parliament member while calling air pollution a silent killer, said that non-asphalted roads, low quality fuel, damaged cars, burning of substandard material by different factories and houses are the main factor behind high level of pollution in Kabul. They asked the related organs to exert utmost efforts to control pollution in Kabul as soon as possible.

Commerce minister Rasa said that control of fuel is the duty of Afghanistan National Standard Authority, which the ministry has no the right to interfere.

He said that refineries in the country has not the capacity to filter the fuel and produce fuel, thus it is required of government to directly import fuel. Head of National Environment Protection Agency of Afghanistan Mustafa Zahir said that 72

percent of pollution is caused by vehicle and dusty roads, 31 percent by commercial and personal institution burning substandard fire materials, 12 percent by brick factories. Kabul Mayor Abdullah Habibzai complained of lack of enough equipment, facilities and staffs in Kabul. He said that our staff is for one million populations but currently, the population increased to around six million in Kabul. We need 600 vehicles, but only Kabul municipality have 170 vehicles, he noted. He said that Kabul municipality only had the capability to transfer 30 percent of trashes. Kabul municipality work over privatization of cleaning program of Kabul city, which will be implemented in coming two years, he claimed. He insisted that by privatization of cleaning program of Kabul, the problem of increasing of trashes will be solved. Substandard canalization system and house, lack of greenery and lack of standard transportation system are other challenges, which Kabul municipality will hold efforts to address the issue in future, he underlined.

It seems that the problem is rapidly worsening in Afghanistan, peculiarly in Kabul, due to mentioned reasons and lack of a true controlling plan. Dozens of the citizens die each year in Kabul while thousands others suffering from severe upper and lower chest infections, including asthma, chronic bronchitis and heart disease due the polluted weather. Reportedly, it caused 3,000 deaths last year whereas the condition is worse comparing to previous year owing to expansion in previous factors and additionally predicted less snow.

Though, People complain resentfully today and the full health tragedy will not be seen for many years. Because the effects of air pollution are chronic, or slow, they build up in the body and impact mostly on older people.

Children exposed to heavy traffic fumes today will have smaller lungs and be more vulnerable to respiratory and heart diseases in their later years. It means, if we underestimate the issue now, we are storing up a health time-bomb for the future, guaranteeing that hospital wards will be full of wheezing people with hearts and lungs permanently damaged just by living in cities. The vast costs to the economy of caring for an increasingly infirm older population will have to be met later.

Lastly air-pollution crisis is not less important than fighting terrorism. The municipality needs to work with private company for rehabilitation of forests, ban the import and use of substandard fuel, improve waste management and at the same time build and strengthen the institutional capacity. It is also important to co-operate with the government in every aspect of issue to overcome the dilemmas and enjoy a life free of silent enemy such as air pollution and terrorist activities. The government is helpless to approach a conclusion in fighting against the silent enemy (air pollution) and terrorists, unless the people co-operate with it.

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Towards Democratization

By Hujjattullah Zia

Democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all, but let not democracy degenerate into monarchy. In democratic states, people are entitled equally and no one is discriminated on the grounds of his/her race, color or creed. Individuals are able to exercise their freedom, mainly freedom of thought and expressions, without barriers. Parliament is considered the "beating heart of democracy" through which the nation's elected representatives approve law and supervise the executive power to maintain the nation's rights and liberty and ensure that officials do not exploit their power.

Moreover, the segregation of powers (legislative, executive and judiciary powers) prevents from the centralization of power in a single entity and gives participatory role to the nation. A fair and free election, in which people's votes bear equal value, is also one of the elements of democracy. There are some principles in election: the principles of population's proportion, equal suffrage, being direct, secret, free and general. Basically, Athens, the capital city of Greece, was the hotbed of democracy and each individual played his/her role in social affairs directly rather than electing representatives - this is called direct democracy which is applicable in a small territory with small number of population. However, Athens' democracy is was not as perfect as it is in modern world since only free men were considered "citizen" and women, slaves and foreigners were deemed inferior and were deprived of their rights. In a nutshell, although Athens paved the ground for democratic states, some were discriminated on the basis of their race and color and this is against the spirit of democracy. Political parties play a highly constructive role in a society. A political party is a group of individuals with common objective having a statute and widespread realm of activities within a territory and continues its activities for a long time via certain financial source. Parties are formed to put a collective energy on a certain goal and work in a systematic way rather than individual and unorganized activities that may lead to failure. Political parties have the responsibility of spreading awareness to the public, transferring the nation's message to the state and monitoring the government's activities. In addition, political parties enlighten the agenda of candidates to facilitate better selection for citizens. States will have to pave equal ground for political parties and equip them with equal resources so that they compete in equal atmosphere.

In democratic states, it is not only parliament but also civil society activists and media that play monitoring role so as to prevent from exploitation of power. MPs have the authority to give vote of confidence to ministers or incapacitate them

in case of not fulfilling their responsibilities honestly. Media spread awareness and host political officials to explain their activities and answer to the questions of the public. Civil society activists are to raise their voice if the state transcends the law. After all, civil disobedience is allowed in democratic states. For instance, when approving a law or signing an agreement put social interests at stake, civil society activists can resort to civil disobedience: which is to be done in open, for political objective and not fearing prosecution. The main goal of civil disobedience is to draw the public attention to injustice done by state or influential organizations and putting pressure on them to revise their plan but it must be the last resort.

However, some philosophers believe that no one is allowed to break the law though it might be unjust. They argue that the nation can put pressure through their representatives to change the law rather than violating it. Socrates is of the same view. When he was condemned by the state to drink hemlock, he succumbed to this though he knew that it was unjust. However, it should be noticed that the Greek democracy was classic and in its basic form. In modern democracy, civil disobedience is allowed to protest against injustice.

Although president and MPs are elected by the votes of the majority but it does not necessarily mean that the rights and liberty of the minority be ignored. Therefore, constitutions must respect and protect the rights of all citizens equally and never discriminate one on his/her racial or religious backgrounds. Democracy is widely accepted for supporting the rights of all individuals and alleviating the pains and sufferings of the citizens. Implementing the very true spirit of democracy is next to impossible but struggles for better democracy never stop since it is relative: one country is more democratic than another. Therefore, governments seek to protect the rights and freedoms of the public in better way to strengthen democratic standards at the national and international levels.

In Afghanistan, there are many barriers before democracy and the nation's rights are trampled upon on a large scale. The graph of civilian casualties is high and militancy continues unabated. The legal period of parliament is ended and the election is yet to be held. Additionally, the transparency of past election was under serious question.

One will conclude that law is violated not only by citizens but also by the state. Undemocratic and anti-democratic practices are seen widely in social and political life which is a matter of great concern. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, steps were taken towards democracy, but the process of democratization is hampered by many barriers.

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