

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



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## Media and Access to Information

The role of media is paramount in today's democratic world. Many intellectuals believe it to be the fourth pillar of the state along with executive, legislature and judiciary and it has the function of keeping an eye on the activities of other three pillars. This generates a sort of pressure and also helps in making the important pillars of state amend themselves and their activities. Nevertheless, for media to acquire and retain this function it is important that it should be independent and should have the opportunities wherein it has full access to information and freedom of expression.

Media is agent of social and political change and awareness. It has the power of developing and changing public opinion. Being available 24 hours a day and containing information from different parts of the world, it has the capacity to reach to most of the people who have access to media outlets. And, the current developments in social media have further invigorated its role and impacts.

Though media's role is important all the times, it becomes overriding during the times of instability and catastrophes. All the sides that are part of any clash, conflict or war, try to use media in their favor and always consider it to be vital for turning the war and the public opinion in their favor.

However, at such moments, it becomes really imperative for media to retain its integrity and unbiased role. Afghanistan has been one of the countries that have been dominated by instability and conflict. The role of media in Afghanistan has been felt to be very much vital, but unfortunately, it is has been developed only in the last decade. Today, it is claimed that Afghan media is independent, yet there are many issues that have to be dealt with to really make it free and independent in the true sense of the word. One of the major issues it faces today is access to information. Because of restrictions put by different authorities it is very difficult for media to have access to accurate information on time.

Afghanistan's Oversight Commission on Access to Information on Monday, December 26, said at a conference that they are working on a national strategy to ensure the media has access to information, adding that in accordance with a presidential decree, government departments have three days in which to classify information after a request before sharing it with the media. It is said that many government institutions do not share information with the media, citing it as confidential. The law of access to information was approved by President Ashraf Ghani in 2014. Two years later, the law has still not been fully implemented. Now however, the commission says media workers can register a complaint with them if refused information. "All the ministries and government institutions have introduced us to who we should ask for information. The media can contact these sources and if the information is not provided within three days, they can register a complaint against the related department with this commission," said Sayed Ikram Afzali, chief of the commission.

A number of commission members meanwhile say that government departments should provide the opportunity to media staff to assess and read classified information in the presence of the related department representatives in order to promote investigative journalism in the country.

Media staff, according to the Declaration of Rights and Duties of the Journalists, must have free access to all information sources, and the right to freely inquire on all events conditioning public life. Therefore, secret of public or private affairs may be opposed only to media staff in exceptional cases and for clearly expressed motives. And, any factor hindering the media staff from having access to all information sources must be considered illegal and should be eliminated.

The claim of the rights of the media is not only advantageous for them but for the entire society. If press and journalists are free to do their job they can support in identifying the facts and figures within the society, which will portray a complete picture and also assist in finding out the deficiencies. Unless, people have the true picture of the socio-political conditions, it is very difficult to have awareness and be able to play a positive role within the society.

Ill-fatedly, Afghanistan is one of the countries that have not been giving enough heed to the freedom of media and the rights of the journalists. The war and conflicts and the negligence of the relevant authorities have resulted in poor development in media sector and particularly in press.

Moreover, different sorts of discrimination against the journalists have continued in different parts of the county. Afghan government, different organizations and groups both national and international must make sure that they strive to make efforts in bringing about real changes for the development of media in the country and must protect the rights of the media staff, particularly the right to free and easy access to information.



## The World is on Water over Water

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

As climate changes, water Shortages are likely to fuel certain conflicts in many region around the world. According to some political analysts, "Water Wars" are becoming inevitable in the world's future as the misuse of water resources continues among countries that share the same water source. International law has proven itself inadequate in defending the equal use of shared water supplies in some parts of the world. The rapid population increase has greatly affected the amount of water readily available to many people. Reports shows over 2,200 incidents, involving conflict and collaboration alike, over shared river basins and resources in last decades. More than 1 billion people around the world have no access to safe, clean drinking water, and over 2.5 billion do not have adequate sanitation service. Over 2 million people die each year because of unsafe water - and most of them are children!

Generally, there are several factors that intensify water shortage and influence water quality such as climate change, agricultural activities, increasing population, types of water supplies, embedded technology in water management sector, wastage of water, quality of sanitation activities, storage of raw water in dry season, quality of canalization network. On the other hand, Clean potable water such as basic life necessity from the following sources is considerable safe: Indented wells, protected dug wells (safe springs), bottled water, rain water collection, pipe into dwelling etc. Relevance to population growth and decreasing agricultural lands, the responsible authorities indispensable to undertake certain measures such as prevention of water losing in traditional agricultural sectors and urban water system network, changing the consumption patterns, regulated plans for drought combating.

Thought water covers two-thirds of the surface of the earth, but fresh water estimated 0.002% on earth. That's why, many regions around the world deal with shortages of water. Some areas deal more with conflicts over inadequate water supplies and disputes over shared water supplies.

In regions where countries compete for access to water, the relations between the countries are likely to become unstable. In regions where water supply is scarce, combat sometimes seems to be the only way to resolve the problem. Like many other natural resources, the estimated 0.002% (1,250 square kilometers) of freshwater not evenly distributed among countries sharing the same water source. While the need for water is essential for food production used in irrigation farming. Water systems usually arise in one country and pass through others before reaching the sea or oceans. The rivers and lakes that come off these larger water systems are typically shared by more than one country. The states where these systems originated tend to try and gain the most control over the water use. Studies show that water scarcity is severe in Afghanistan with its neighboring countries. Recently, Hamid Karzai, the former president of

Afghanistan said at a New Afghanistan Research and Studies Center (NARSC) conference in Kabul that a large amount of water goes to Iran and Pakistan and that those countries should respect Afghanistan's water rights. "Our water is being given freely to neighboring countries; I am worried about water security in future especially in light of climate change. If we have more water, we will give a part of it to our neighbors," he expressed.

According to data provided by NASRC, Afghanistan only uses 30 percent of its total annual natural water while the rest goes to neighboring countries without receiving any money in exchange. In fact, the chaotic politics of water between Afghanistan and its neighbors has a long history, due to the lack of water-sharing agreements between them.

Despite sharing 90 percent of its water resources with neighbors, Afghanistan has only one bilateral water treaty, with Iran Signed in 1973. Consistent with the agreement, Iran should receive 850 million cubic meters of water annually from the Helmand River basin. But it is said that they have been receiving 70 percent more than the amount of water initially agreed upon in 1973. Furthermore, without consulting Afghanistan, Iran has built infrastructure on the water flowing from Afghanistan.

To satisfy domestic needs, we need to invest in water infrastructure throughout the country, and devise an efficient plan which should also include the control of medical waste and polluted water in urban areas that is contaminating water supplies. Water sources should be distributed through pipelines and needs clusters of water tanks should be constructed in different areas to provide drinking water.

New research is needed to form a collective diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of current river basin management practices especially in major cities. This would help ensure future plans for action are rooted in a realistic assessment of the current situation and add practical value where it's. Additionally, water misuse is rampant in the country therefore, necessary actions must be taken place broadly.

To prevent any conflicts, all actors, Afghanistan and neighboring countries should commit themselves to regional cooperation and collective legitimate action. Any disputes and disagreement over water sharing between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries will lead to further tangled ties in the region. And future socioeconomic, environmental, and hydrologic challenges will threaten all. Any potential water treaty between Afghanistan and neighbors in the future should generate gains for all the stakeholders. It is time for the leaders of these countries to agree on the common cause of development in the region and build their relationships. They must act like statesmen and work for the next generation. The only option the region has for survival is consensus and agreement on pressing issues such as security, economic progress, and water sharing.

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## The Bleeding Wound of Human Societies

By Hujjatullah Zia

Human societies left a bloody history behind and men's selfishness led to perilous wars within centuries. The cruel practices and ethnocentric emotion inflicted heavy casualties upon nations in many parts of the world. The three decades of religious war in Europe and deadly war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 reveal the ugly face of wars and violence. The Peace of Westphalia, which was a series of peace treaties signed between May and October 1648, ended the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) of religion in the Holy Roman Empire.

To view the casualties in Bosnian war, estimates of the total number of casualties have ranged from 25,000 to 329,000. The variations are partly the result of the use of inconsistent definitions of who can be considered victims of the war, as some research calculated only direct casualties of military activity while other research included those who died from hunger, cold, disease or other war conditions.

Early over-counts were also the result of many victims being entered in both civilian and military lists because little systematic coordination of those lists took place in wartime conditions. The death toll was originally estimated in 1994 at around 200,000 by Cherif Bassiouni, head of the UN expert commission investigating war crimes.

To one's unmitigated chagrin, the history repeats itself in human societies and war and violence continue unabated around the globe, mainly in terrorist-stricken countries. According to UN's report, approximately 400,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict that dates back to a 2011 popular uprising against Assad's regime, about five million have fled into neighboring countries over the years, while six million remain internally displaced. Hence, the number of casualties in Syria has surpassed the fatality rate caused in Bosnia's war - this is a great matter of concern.

Human societies are still involved in religious and ideological wars despite leaving a tragic history behind - which rooted in lack of religious tolerance and radical ideology. Currently, Islamic societies suffer the labor of parochial mindsets giving birth to radicalism - however some political hands are also believed to work behind the veil.

As a result, the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is the product of both radical narration of religion and political game played mysteriously. The terrorist networks violate human rights and humanitarian law for one reason or another without an iota of mercy.

They seek to impose their ideology with gunpoint and killed people on the grounds of their race and color - these issues were the main reasons behind historical wars. In a nutshell, it is terribly sad to see that the destructive wars were not an

eye-opener for human societies and they still spill the blood of one another for claiming superiority and thirst for power. With the high graph of casualties in Syria and continuation of war, which has also involved super powers, it is believed that this war is more perilous than one in Bosnia, since these heavy casualties have come without a positive result.

The terrorist networks spread fear and hatred around the globe and trigger a sense of mistrust among the countries. It goes without saying that the ISIL fighters blackmail the entire world through violence and bloodshed. For instance, within the last two years, the militants carried out terrorist attacks in the US, Germany, French, etc. which generated Islamophobia in Europe and America.

2016 was a highly bloody and tragic year for Afghan nation as the graph of fatality rate mounted to a great extent. Members of the Taliban also come from radical background and refuse to hold talks with Afghan government. The people of Afghanistan suffered not only under their regime but continue to undergo militancy. Thus, terrorism and insurgency are the main reasons behind the current challenges as people lose their lives or take refuge to Europe.

"To put it figuratively in biblical language, we have left the dusty soils of Egypt and crossed a Red Sea whose waters had for years been hardened by a long and piercing winter of massive resistance. But before we reach the majestic shores of the Promised Land, there is a frustrating and bewildering wilderness ahead.

We must still face prodigious hilltops of opposition and gigantic mountains of resistance. But with patient and firm determination we will press on until every valley of despair is exalted to new peaks of hope, until every mountain of pride and irrationality is made low by the leveling process of humility and compassion..." these words were spoken by Martin Luther King in Nobel Lecture about peace and justice on December, 1964.

When the spirit of brotherhood and religious tolerance are not exercised among human societies and men's selfishness keep on ruling, peace and stability will never emerge.

The fatal wars led to indescribable loss must be an eye-opener for the world and the international families must strengthen unity and join forces to eliminate all terrorist networks and sanctuaries regardless of their geographical boundaries. Terrorism has put the world in a serious predicament and national and international conferences and meetings have yet to find out the last solution.

The International community will have to put an end to the current wars to prevent from further casualties and prosecute the human rights violators.

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