

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



February 17, 2016

## Afghanistan Earns 7 Golds in SAG

Games have always played an important role in the lives of individuals and societies. They are not only a part of entertainment but, at the same time, an important reason for better health conditions. Moreover, they are also an opportunity for different nations of the world to make themselves known to the world and earn pride by achieving great performances. Today, there are many nations of the world that are recognized because of the particular sports they have performed in. In addition, the players who have won distinctions in different games are mostly recognized along with the names of their countries.

Games are also very much helpful in developing social interactions and strengthening them to a great extent. The most important thing that it teaches the sportsmen is the team work. The players, being parts of different teams, learn to manage social interactions and relations and start mastering the very basic rule of the society, which is social interdependence.

On the other hand the games are also very much helpful in strengthening the ties between the nations. Two nations competing in a game can have better understanding of each other's culture and tradition, which can help in bringing the nations closer to each other.

The games can also be helpful in keeping the members of a society away from the negative activities. They have always been considered as useful tools in reducing the use of drugs, crimes and other non-constructive activities.

There are different sports events throughout the world that attract people to a great extent, bring them together and at the same time provide a huge amount of entertainment. The South Asian Games (SAG) is an important one among such events.

The South Asian Games (SAG), a multi-sport event, is basically the regional Games of the Olympic Council of Asia, also sometimes considered as South Asian version of Olympic Games. It is governed by South Asian Sports Council (SASC), which was formed in 1983. The games were first hosted by Kathmandu, Nepal in the year 1984. Except for few occasions, the event is taking place every alternate year. Currently, the members of the event are the eight South Asian countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The event is aimed at promoting sports with a view to boost up the team spirit as well as an amiable relationship between the South Asian countries.

The 12th South Asian Games have just ended in India. 23 sports disciplines were held in 26 venues across the cities of Guwahati and Shillong (16 in Guwahati and 7 in Shillong).

The good news is that Afghanistan stood fourth and earned a total of 35 medals: 7 Gold, 9 Silver and 19 Bronze. Afghans did the best in Taekwondo and bagged six gold medals, one silver and one bronze in the finals of the Taekwondo event in the Games. India stood second and won five gold, three silver and two bronze medals.

Keeping in view the conditions in Afghanistan and the amount of the concentration and money devoted to the sports, it can be concluded that what Afghanistan has achieved in the Games is really a great achievement. The government in Afghanistan has mostly devoted itself to the issues of security and politics, while different sports have almost been neglected, yet again the sportsmen in the country have been brilliant. It can be witnessed that different individuals and teams, in certain sports have not disappointed the nation though they face myriads of problems in their games. The competing countries were comparatively having more advantages as their countries devote more budget and energy for the sports. For Afghanistan to expect a sufficient budget for sports is really very difficult as there are many other basic requirements to concentrate on.

However, it is imperative for Afghanistan to understand that the sportsmen have brought them great name. Recently, they have been raising the flag of the country in different parts of the world and proving that Afghans are no worse than others in the world of sports. Therefore, it is vital for the authorities in Afghanistan to understand that the games and sportsmen have a higher role than just playing games; therefore, they should be given due attention and they should be provided with the facilities so that they are able to compete with other nations of the world. Different sports institutions should be maintained properly and they should be free of corruption and discrimination. It is the spirit of sports that talent should be respected and promoted; therefore, all the sports institutions must have high regard for talent. If promoted properly, sports can turn into a weapon to fight against the evils like terrorism and drugs, which have influenced our nation, especially our youth to a large extent. We, therefore, need to promote sports and make it a way to divert the attention of the youth from these evils.



# Government's Failure to Curb Corruption

By Dilawar Sherzai

Afghanistan is one of the countries largely influenced by the menace of corruption. Corruption has, in fact, penetrated deep within different institutions in the country and has crippled the overall systems. Afghanistan has, therefore, failed to deliver maximum at the time when the development has been required the most and, in the process, has also lost some golden opportunities. Corruption has been lethal enough to annihilate the efforts or the plans to reconstruct the country and the different systems that may set it on the way to development.

There seems to be no doubt in the fact that one of the basic reasons of the persistent rise in corruption in Afghanistan is the lack of commitment and honest efforts to control and eradicate this menace. Neither the previous government, nor the current National Unity Government (NUG) has shown real efforts to face it seriously. Therefore, the serpent has survived and has become reckless and out of control. In fact, it would now require a bold step to stand against it as it would, definitely, devour wholly the person who may confront it.

It is a real challenge now for the Afghan government to stand against it. However, a solid and dedicated effort against it can make a difference. It is not altogether impossible to defeat it. Definitely, strict measures are required, temperaments would be tested, institutions would be questioned, the powerful would have to be threatened; in short, the whole mechanism would be shaken if there are real and honest efforts. And, it should be noted that there is no alternative for Afghanistan. The way it is following leads to chaos and instability. If it has to change its route it must decide now and act accordingly. At least, the Afghan government must act according to its promises it made in the early days of its formation.

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) on Sunday, February 14, blamed leaders of the NUG for failing to deliver on their promises to fight corruption in the country. They also said that government's attempts to fight corruption have been feeble. Meanwhile, the findings of the fact finding committee tasked to probe the controversial Smart City project, with former Kabul Bank defaulter Khalilullah Forozi, reveals that the president's former legal advisor, the ministry of urban development affairs, the attorney general's office and Kabul Bank clearance department acted against the law in signing the controversial project with Forozi.

It is threatening to find the top government institutions that should be the guardians of law and must set example for oth-

ers are themselves involved in corruption. There are different individuals, on high posts, who take certain decisions keeping only their own personal benefits in consideration. Therefore, it can be seen that the claimed development in Afghanistan has only benefitted a particular stratum in the society, while the majority remain poor and in pathetic condition.

The authoritative individuals in Afghanistan use opportunities and even law for changing the status of their own bank balance, not the conditions in the country. For Afghan government, the task starts from itself. It has to do a self-assessment, must check its ranks and strive to cleanse itself of corrupt individuals and practices. However, the question then remains the same - why should it do so if it is gaining advantages from it? It is difficult to answer such a question. Nonetheless, in such a condition the others factions of the society must play its role. The supporting nations, who provide aid to the country must ensure its best utilization. They must have zero tolerance policy against corruption. They should make sure that the aids that they provide do not end in the bank accounts of certain individuals but actually reach to the targeted communities. The prevailing poverty and multiplying miseries of the poor people in different parts of the country even after receiving millions in aid must be enough example for the supporting nations to ensure best utilization of their aid.

In addition to that the independent institutions, civil society and media (including social media) can play their role in pressuring the government to curb corruption. Though the voices of civil society and media are not heard in the way they should be heard but they can never go unnoticed. Recently, the role of the civil society and media in Afghanistan has become louder and more influential and it can have certain pressure on the government to take necessary measures against corruption. Moreover, the civil society and media in Afghanistan can observe the other countries and can take lessons from them where the media and civil societies have been able to change the entire system. At the end, it is the responsibility of the people as a whole to keep a check on the political and social issues and play their roles in changing them. Afghan people, especially youth, are not the same as 15 years ago. There are marked changes, which can be felt by different factors in the society. Therefore, they can now play their role in changing the government policies and practices. People, as a whole, are a great power. They can pressurize government and other institutions to take measures so as to curb the menace of corruption. Moreover, they can play a role in curbing corruption by saying no to it in their daily lives and interactions.

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## Afghanistan's Contradicting Stance on Taliban Insurgency

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the peace efforts unfolding, the terminology on the insurgency and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is also changing. The Afghan government is finding it difficult how to label the various militant groups fighting government forces. Since long ago, there have been efforts going on to differentiate between the militant groups who are potential future peace stakeholders in Afghanistan and those who will likely continue their fight. Speaking at Munich Security Conference, President Ashraf Ghani emphasized on the threat of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda and urged the world to relentlessly fight these groups. The president said that the insurgency going on in Afghanistan is not a civil war, but the insecurity and challenges in the country have in fact originated from other regional countries.

The long-term threat of Taliban to Afghanistan's security and stability was largely missing in President Ghani's speech in the top world security conference. This is while observers and Afghan and American intelligence and security officials believe that the Islamic State group has been considerably weakened due to the persistent NATO and Afghan forces' military operations as well as Taliban offensives against the group. Afghan defense officials say that the Islamic State group has failed to establish the group's base in Afghanistan with the aim to threaten the Central Asia. Since its emergence in Afghanistan, the Islamic State group has been under immense pressures from all its opponents including the Afghan government, the US and the Taliban. Despite the group's efforts to find footholds in provinces like Helmand and Farah in the South and Nuristan and Kunar in the east, its presence is now largely limited to the eastern Nangarhar province. Due to this, the group has largely failed to become a major long-term existential threat for Afghanistan. The sustainable pressures from all relevant parties of the conflict on the Islamic State group in Afghanistan are a rare consensus among warring sides in Afghanistan. The course of the fight against the Islamic State group seems to be on the right track with all major external players such as the US and Pakistan aligned with the government of Afghanistan's military efforts against the group. This is a promising for the collective efforts to prevent the Islamic State find a foothold in Afghanistan. Obviously, the Afghan government needs to keep the pressures on the group and continue to forge a regional consensus for combating the group.

But perhaps no one would disagree with the fact that the Taliban remain the biggest threat to future stability of the country. Afghanistan needs to deal with the group as an existential threat to the future stability of the country, and forge an international consensus over the threat. The Taliban threaten major cities in the north and south of the country and are bracing for another bitter year of fighting. In 2015, the group wracked havoc across the country and had considerable gains in the fight against government forces. The Taliban threatened major cities and towns last year and even momentarily took the strategic

northern Kunduz city. 2016 predicted as highly challenging year for Afghanistan as the Taliban are preparing for launching a heightened insurgency this year.

In a tone indicating once again broadening US involvement in Afghanistan, the outgoing NATO commander John Campbell said on Saturday that the coalition forces "are here to stay." According to Campbell, the Afghan forces are set to face a tough time next summer. Campbell said that "the Taliban has no vision for the future of Afghanistan. They don't believe in education, they don't believe in women's rights. They don't believe in the Afghan Constitution. All they believe in is violence and killing women and children." Campbell's statement appropriately depicts Taliban and the threat it poses to the future of Afghanistan. And his statement of the US and the whole international community "starting to talk about long-term commitment" in Afghanistan is a promising sign of a re-shift of the US and NATO approach towards Afghanistan.

As another aspect of the mainly Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, the US mission in Afghanistan announced that civilian casualties in 2015 reached its highest level since the start of the conflict in 2001. According to UNAMA, over 11,000 fatalities had been recorded in 2015 which shows a 4-percent increase than in 2014. Sixty two percent of the casualties are attributed to the anti-government groups. The fact is that the Taliban is by far a dominant player in the insurgency of the militant groups in Afghanistan. The staggering sustained rise in civilian casualties suggests how the insurgent groups including the Taliban continue to commit atrocities against civilian population in the country. The government has set an eye on the peace efforts to bring the mainstream Taliban group into civilian life and put an end to the conflict. That is a rightful wish for the government. But avoiding labeling the Taliban a long-term threat and a terrorist group is in no way helping the Afghan government's efforts to stabilize the country. One of the most important incentives to drive the Taliban into the peace process is maintaining sustained military pressures against the group on the battlefields. Afghanistan cannot do this without a sustained support from the international community. To ensure that commitment, Afghanistan needs to promote its counter-insurgency policy at the international level and persuade the international community to help the country in the counter insurgency campaign.

President Ghani perhaps deliberately did not seek to persuade the international community in the Munich Security Conference that the Taliban is a terrorist organization and continue to remain a long-term threat to stability of Afghanistan. As he has previously called the Taliban as "political opponents" of the Afghan government, he didn't need to term the group "terrorist", but he needed to use the opportunity at the international policy platform in Munich and seek the international community's long-term commitment to support the ongoing campaign against the Taliban insurgency.

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