

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

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Positive Signals from Afghan-Pak Ties!

Last week, the visit of Pakistani military chief, General Raheel Sharif was one of the most important events in the country. This was the fourth visit of Kabul by Pakistani Chief of Army Staff after the formation of coalition government. In his meeting, he not only met the president Ashraf Ghani but also had meetings with Afghan military officers and a number of other top government figures. According to some sources, he had come to ask for cooperation of Afghan forces in tightening their grip around terrorists of TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) hiding in the Afghan areas bordering with Pakistan. It is said that the chief of TTP, Maulana Fazlullah, who had authorized the attack on a school in Peshawar, is also hiding in these places and Afghan forces have got real close to him. The visit of Gen. Sharif was part of checking the coordination between the forces of the two countries in this area and tightening the circle around the terrorists.

Both military and political relations between the two neighboring countries considerably improved after the formation of unity government in Afghanistan. On a number of issues, the relations between the two countries had badly deteriorated in the final days of previous president, Mr. Karzai. However, the president Ashraf Ghani started to work on the improvement of the relations between the two countries right from the first day of his arrival at the office. In his official visit to Pakistan, he not only met the top Pakistani politicians but also had special meetings with important officers of Pakistani military and expressed his desire for the improvement of relations between the two countries both on political and military levels.

After the terror attack on a school in Peshawar, the chief of Pakistani military paid visits to Afghanistan and asked for the cooperation against the terrorists of TTP who had crossed the border to Afghanistan and in fact, the attack had been monitored from a place inside Afghanistan. Afghanistan responded positively to this request of Pakistan and a vast military operation was started in the bordering Afghan areas. Till then, the military on both sides of border have made considerable achievements and it is hoped that with the mutual cooperation of both the forces, the terrorists on both sides of the border would be eliminated altogether.

Along with the military cooperation, both the countries have also made considerable improvement in their political ties. According to the German radio, DeutscheWelle, Pakistani foreign minister met the US Secretary of State, John Kerry in Washington and informed him about the improving relations between the two countries. Mr. Kerry expressed his pleasure on this and congratulated the leadership of both the countries in improving the relations. According to some political experts, the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are on peak since the inception of democratic government in 2001.

Afghan government has also expressed its desire to improve the relations between the two countries and has welcomed the statement of Pakistani government which said that Pakistan considers the enemy of Afghanistan as its own enemy. It is due to these favorable relations that Afghan government agreed to send its military officers for training in Pakistan. Though this offer was made by Pakistani government for a number of times in past as well but the worsening relations between the two countries had not made it possible to happen.

According to the Presidential Palace, the visit of Raheel Sharif had some 'enlightening messages' which would be revealed in a few weeks' time. According to some sources, Pakistani military chief had brought the news that Taliban have shown some willingness to come on the table of talks. Right from the day one at his office, President Ashraf Ghani had also expressed his desire to hold talks with Taliban and other anti-state forces and had always reiterated to take the path of dialogue in dealing with Taliban. This good news given by Pakistani military chief is very important and we can hope that the leaders on both the sides will be able to bring a rational and permanent solution to the problem of terrorism in the region.

It is a fact that both the neighboring countries are inevitable for each other and they need to coexist with mutual respect and cooperation. The biggest problem faced by both the countries is terrorism. If Afghanistan is under the threat of Taliban and a number of other terrorist organizations, Pakistani cities are also under constant terror attacks and it is the reason that Pakistani forces are busy in a massive military operation against terrorists in the northern areas of their country. On the other hand, the economic relations of both the countries are closely tied to each other. Afghanistan imports goods of billions of dollars from Pakistan and plays an important role in the economy of Pakistan. On the other hand, more than 1.5 million afghan are living in Pakistan as refugees and Pakistani people have treated them really gently and respectfully. Similarly, there are strong bounds of culture and religion between the two countries. Although there have been some fluctuations in the relations between these two neighbors but it is necessary that both the countries should work to promote their relations. Present improvement in relations is really optimistic and both the countries need to continue their efforts in further strengthening the ties between them.

House building without Approval by Concerned Authorities



Time for Serious Efforts

By Dilawar Sherzai

In post withdrawal Afghanistan, the peace process between Afghan government and Taliban have become even more important; however, the expectations regarding it are still not very high as there have been certain setbacks in this regard.

During the reign of Karzai in Afghanistan, the High Peace Council on many occasions heralded the "good news" but that only proved to be an eye wash. All the efforts ended up in smoke and even led to the killings of leading members of the Council.

The political analysts, at that time, and even now, believe that the peace process with Taliban can never be fruitful without the involvement of Pakistan - it is also known by Afghanistan's current government and Pakistani establishment. However, the concerns and controversy have mostly been there on the role and the sincerity of Pakistani authorities in this regard. Throughout the reign of previous government, the role of Pakistan was doubted and both the countries could never, with all the readiness and willingness, sit together and resolve the issue.

Nonetheless, the current Afghan government, right from the beginning, seems to be in a different tempo regarding relations with Pakistan. President Ashraf Ghani has openly remarked that peace in Afghanistan is not possible without Pakistan and the vice versa has been accepted by Pakistani leadership, as well. Both the current governments try to give the impression that they are really sincere this time and would be able to make an important achievement regarding the process.

There have been several visits by Pakistani military and political leaderships to Kabul and President Ghani also paid an important visit to Islamabad. These visits have said to be helpful in rebuilding confidence between the two nations and they are also considered as precursor to lasting cooperation regarding the peace process with Taliban.

On Tuesday last week, Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif, paid another visit to Kabul and met Afghan President and Chief Executive Officer - Abdullah Abdullah. It is said that the visit was very vital as it highlighted that Taliban are ready for peace negotiations with Afghan government. If true, and then pursued with honest intentions, peace talks with Taliban can be the first major step towards peace process.

According to Pakistani news sources, Pakistan military spokesman has said, "While onus for such negotiations to succeed lies on both parties concerned, Pakistan in all sincerity will support the process, as peace in Afghanistan will contribute to peace in the region. We hope all stakeholders will continue to act with responsibility not to allow detractors of peace to succeed."

The same source also claimed that direct talks with Afghan government would soon be started by Taliban, who earlier were not willing to cooperate in this regard.

At the same time, there is regional support for the peace process as well, particularly from China. China, recently, has clearly mentioned its support for the process. It also believes that Pakistan can play a vital role in the process. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during his last visit to Islamabad also offered to facilitate and play constructive role in reconciliation. Commenting on the role of Pakistan regarding the efforts of reconciliation in Afghanistan, he had said, "Pakistan has an irreplaceable role in resolving the Afghan issue. Pakistan has a strong will for playing a constructive role for its resolution."

If both China and Pakistan continue their efforts and support Afghanistan, there would definitely be some important achievements regarding the reconciliation process. China has strong influence in the regional politics and its role in the fight against terrorism in the region can be vital.

Moreover, it is also a matter of interest for all the countries in the region, particularly for Pakistan, China and India. These countries have been affected badly by terrorism and eradication of terrorism from Afghanistan and Pakistan can benefit all of them alike. Particularly for Pakistan it is of utmost importance that a critical decision should be taken against Terrorism and Talibanization as it has already paid heavy price in this regard.

The Army Public School incident in Peshawar left no doubt that Pakistan had to be really serious about combating terrorism and terrorists, particularly Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Though Pakistan Army had already started operations against them, the incident encouraged them to strengthen those operations. Now, all Pakistan requires to do is further embolden its stance against the terrorist organizations in the country and at the same time support Afghan government in the reconciliation process as there is no other way out.

President Ghani, right from the beginning of his tenure, has been very positive about the role of Pakistan in Afghan peace process. He on Friday, February 20, once again appreciated Pakistan's efforts for facilitating opportunity to ensure peace in Afghanistan and to bring the reconciliation process with Taliban back on its track. A statement from the Presidential Palace said that the unity government had invigorated efforts to bring peace and stability to the country since its beginning. The statement further added that the leaderships in Kabul and Islamabad had now realized to work in cooperation with each other to resolve challenges in this regard.

It, in fact, is now or never situation for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Negligence, this time, by any of the stakeholders can lead the entire region towards the horrors of terrorism. There

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Our Youth's Psychological Needs should be Valued

By Hujjatullah Zia

Our youth seek to embellish their worlds according to their own perspectives. Being sanguine about the future, they have a tendency to face adventures, live an independent life and practice the freedom of thought and action in their daily life. Moreover, they feel a strong sense of intrinsic love for beauty. Therefore, they feel impelled to eradicate the impediments and experience the life vicissitudes by their own. These facts are supposed to be recognized by parents and elders.

Ill-fatedly, our youth's psychological needs are constantly overlooked within families and they are urged to condescend to imitation. In addition, they are labeled "irreligious" for violating the traditional taboos or behaving against the taste of their senile parents.

It is youth's inner needs to experience the facts of life and analyze the outcome of their actions. Parents, teachers and religious scholars are a need to give some rational and kind advice rather than to dictate their own frames of mind. Likewise, freedom of thought is the basic needs of our youth. Some may argue that they are subjugated to feelings and emotions and, therefore, they are highly susceptible to error. But youth are not impeccable creature - they are only human - and need freedom of thought whether to think rightly or wrongly.

In spite of the youth's aversion to dos and don'ts, parents demur their ways of clothing or walking with vitriolic verbal attacks.

They are accused of besmirching family's reputation for lax way of clothing. The elders seek to impose their own mentality and even taste of clothing on their scions. They ignore the needs of the teenagers, who are ready to shoulder the responsibilities, to freedom of action.

Youth are accused of violating moral values and social norms. It should be noted that the youth tend to behave according to their own way of thinking. For instance, they grow a strong sense of feeling for beauty on the grounds of their psychological structure. In short, they focus on the beautiful aspects of life and such slight issues may lead to strife between the youth and the old. So, when the obsolete traditions, which originate in the conservative frames of mind, are violated, the elder accuse them of breaking moral values, social norms or religious taboos. Therefore, the schism between the two groups widens.

Parents teach their children religious guidelines in a fractious manner. For example, they shout at them in early morning to wake up for offering prayer. Moreover, they indoctrinate their children the angry face of religion such as Hell, gigantic insects, blazing fire, painful tortures and other of such ilk. Pointing out the negative aspects with violent behavior

will fill one with puissant sense of hatred. Furthermore, when their children make a small mistake, they heap harsh invective upon them.

The traditional platitude about religion cannot satiate the youth's spiritual thirst either. Many religious messages remain in mystery for our youth, and the clergy do not bother themselves to explain and interpret them to accord the social needs of modern age. I mean that, for example, if the philosophy of Hijab be explained to our female youth, we need not force them wear Hijab, they will do voluntarily. Or if we explain the philosophy of prayer to them, we need not shout at them every morning to wake up early, they will do earnestly. Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884 - 1976), a German theologian, talks suitably of demythologization in modern world. He believes that some myths have been combined with religions which are in contrary with rationality. Bultmann persists that the mythical issues should be interpreted in a way so as to be acceptable for the contemporary men.

For clarification, Bultmann cited the first-century view of the universe in which people thought that the earth was a sphere, with heaven above and hell beneath; in this sense it formed a "three-tiered" universe. He explained that people of that time used this mythical view of the universe to explain the divine in human terms.

Karl Marx was also talking of demystification. He believed that in the past people lived in a mysterious world and now we are supposed to demystify it. Hence, our religious scholars have to shoulder the responsibility of demystifying religious guidelines and interpreting them in modern term - so as to be understandable for our youth.

The media also play a negative role and influence our youth to a large extent. In the current age of eruption of information, our youth are inundated with foreign cultures and non-Islamic values. Our local media broadcast foreign serials, amorous films and music and romantic programs without feeling an iota of responsibility. To write with candor, the local media hardly ever hold the national cultures and beliefs in respect. Thus, the media are liable for spoiling the morality of our youth.

It is beyond doubt that the youth play pivotal role in a society. Besides being entitled with their rights, their psychological needs must be considered seriously by the elders. Their natural tendency, mentality and frames of mind and their lifestyle, which roots in their personal perspectives, should be held in great respect. Hence, the parents and the elders are supposed to revise their attitudes towards them. Likewise, the cultural activists, especially those who run cultural programs in local media, are urged to consider the vulnerability of our youth and play their role positively in this regard.

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