

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

The Leading Independent Newspaper

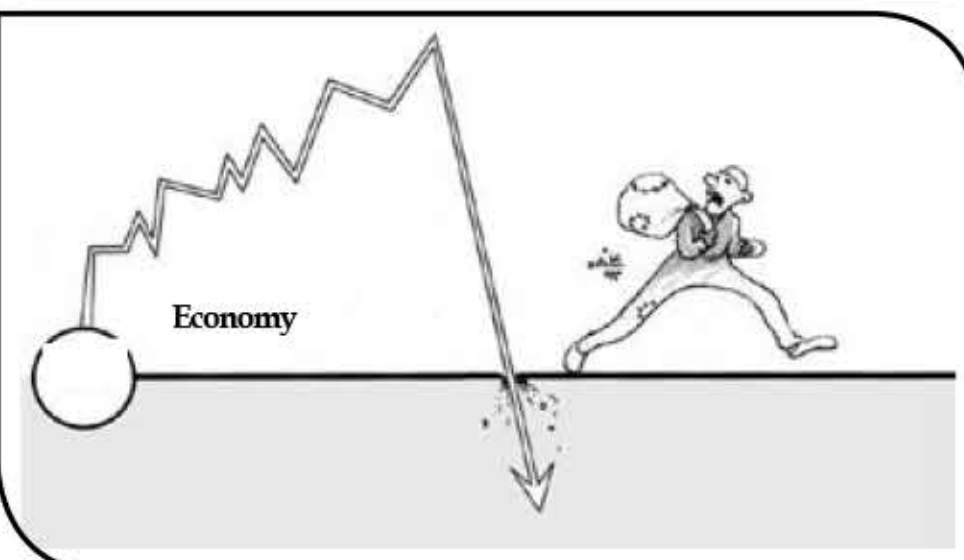
February 26, 2015

## Avalanche Turned Death Claimer Amidst Government Negligence

Afghanistan recorded variant quantity of snow fall, this year. Nonetheless, Panjshir and Badakhshan are among the provinces that witnessed record snow fall, leading to blockade of some of the districts roads. It was this heavy snow that resulted in snow avalanches hitting different villages in central Panjshir province; resulting in several casualties with scores gone missing. According to public official at least 72 persons have been found dead after 106 individuals went missing. The heavy hit areas are Bazarak, the provincial capital, Piryan and Hisa Dowam Districts. Out of all natural disasters, flood and landslide and avalanche turned the deadliest killing hundreds of people. Usually various parts of Afghanistan are subject to flooding and mudslides and avalanche during the spring and summer months due to ice and snow melt in the mountainous regions, that reaches the main rivers via water seepage through rocks and lands. Nonetheless in winter whenever heavy snow falls take place the chances of avalanches multiplies, accordingly that likely increase of the fear of countless casualties. Avalanche, alternatively known as snow-slide or snow-slip, is a rapid flow of snow down a sloping surface. Avalanches are typically triggered in a starting zone from a mechanical failure in the snowpack when the forces on the snow exceed its strength. The load on the snowpack may be only due to gravity, in which case failure may result either from weakening in the snowpack or increased load due to precipitation. Avalanches that occur in this way are known as spontaneous avalanches. It is estimated that spontaneous avalanches might have been behind the tragic incident. The ground sources asserts the people gone missing might hardly be uncovered, diminishing the chances of their survival. The reservation dismisses given a handy approach is put into practice to safeguard the trapped civilians. Since, the thick snow has left the district center completely/partially disconnected from the affected villages. It gets hard to supply the troubled area with need machinery and handy equipments. The people at the scene are seen using wooden shovel to recover their loved ones lying deep under the thick pile of snow. This clearly is reflecting the gravity of problems and its aftermath handiness to deal with situation. The lack of resources complicated the search for those missing and recovers the dead from affected areas. It was the latest in a string of deadly avalanches in the said provinces. However, the necessary equipments needed to carry out rescue operations restricted their abilities, to duly save precious lives and it will do so on.

Undeniably man has rendered hapless before monstrous natural calamities that have ever hit hard civilian population and ruined well built cities. The calamities such as cyclone, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, massive floods and avalanche have turned catastrophic claiming thousands of lives. It is an absolute finding, these calamities can't be prevented, but bringing pragmatic measures into use, both human and infrastructural losses can be restrained to a maximum. The operational services of government and public officials and concerned departments seemed negligible. It is not the only tragic natural disaster that claimed tens of lives whilst disclosing government's incompetence. Similarly, last August, hundreds of people were killed and made homeless by flooding and landslide that wreaked havoc across central Afghanistan, including Kabul. It was indeed a great tragedy that left hundreds of precious lives dead at the earliest hours. Many lives could be rescued if aids had reached on time. The inadvertence, lack of proper plans and inefficiency of government is wholly unearthed, subsequent to the onset of natural calamity that rendered heart wrecking and regrettable. Following, the tragic avalanche, the government quick response seemed minimal, evens the aid and rescue operation couldn't begin after hours. It was later disclosed the government didn't owe sophisticated, handy tools and equipments that could help dug out the buried lives.

The tragic incident of Pajshir and Badakhshan that claimed scores of precious lives put our collective consciousness, at the test. None of the public official seen at the site of tragedy, clearly manifests the despotic brought up of such elected and selected officials. It takes them long to turn themselves pursuant of public interests and don't let people feel a sense of loneliness. The public officials must have paid the earliest visits to the site. The visits of official meant not only to share a sense of togetherness, possible cooperation by the government but also the gravity of the issue, and its feasible remedy that could be undertaken. The whole scenario uncovered the selfless services are yet to be exercised by our political leader. Seeing the intensity of the tragedy and its inability to cope the deteriorating state of affairs, the government must have asked for international rapid response force to uncover the buried lives. The government should assure complete rehabilitation of affected populations and reconstruction of durable residences should be executed on priority bases. A prevalent but shameful silence is witnessed, seeing none of public official came forth to denounce the tragic incident. It was expected the President and CEO immediately issue orders to National Disaster Management Authority to dispatch hasty services to the site. A state of emergency should have been declared for rapid recovery of trapped civilian; mobile hospitals should have been established to treat the worst injured people. More, the premier must have shared grievances of victims by meeting the daily needs of people who left to the mercy of terrible and shivering cold weather.



## Sectarianism Targets Afghans

By Hujjatullah Zia

A number of Afghan refugees returned from Iran with ardent desire to breathe a sigh of relief in their own country. They dreamt of alleviating the burden of nomadic life beside their family members. Afghans' nascent democracy seemed to them a panacea for all challenges. The ferment of election in 2014 may have compounded their sense of patriotism. The ostensible discourse of liberty, human rights, reconciliation, etc. was cogent enough for them to return their homes. To their unmitigated chagrin, their dream did not come true and their burning hopes were crumbled on the way to their domiciles. Reports say that masked gunmen abducted 30 Afghan men, Hazaras, who were travelling by bus through southern Afghanistan after returning from Iran - on Monday evening on Herat-Kabul highway. Nasir Ahmad, an official with the Ghazni Paima bus company, is quoted as, "Our driver saw a group of masked men in Afghan army uniform signaling him and he thought they were soldiers so he stopped .... The gunmen took 30 Hazaras away with them." Moreover, a female passenger is quoted as saying, "They were standing on the highway with their faces covered .... They only took Hazaras, including my cousins. After they took the people, the police arrived but they refused to go after the kidnappers, saying they needed orders from Kabul."

The district governor blamed the militant group, though the police commander of Zabul province said the district borders Pakistan and that there is a good chance that the gunmen were from that country and took their victims back across the border. Although no group, including the Taliban insurgents, has claimed the responsibility for abduction but a feeling of fear has permeated Afghans recently that the influence of the Islamic State (IS) group, which has a strongly anti-Shiite agenda, could be growing in Afghanistan. As a result, local officials reported the burnings of a shrine and several homes in Charkh district of Logar province, on Monday, by a group said to be affiliated to Islamic State, which is largely based in areas of Iraq and Syria.

Compared with Iraq and Pakistan, sectarianism historically has not been as serious an issue in Afghanistan. Even the Taliban militants have taken a much less sectarian stance in recent years. After all, the militants have sought, sporadically, to foment sectarianism between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. In other words, they muddy the water to make use of the opportunity in their own political interests. Their appetite for turbulence and terror originate in their fundamental ideology. Despite their infamy - especially after running a 5-year-brutal-regime in Afghanistan - the Taliban ragtag militants

yet persevere to keep their cruelty under the veneer of social decorum. For instance, they balk at the idea of killing non-combatants, who are not affiliated with government, or abducting them under no suspicion. Moreover, they feel disdain for mugging the travelers on the way to their destination. Hence, this anomaly could have happened only by hardliners - who may have link whether with Islamic State or al-Qaeda. During the Taliban regime, sectarian violence reached its peak. The Shiite minority suffered heavy casualties as a result of Taliban's fundamental ideology and puissant sense of ethnocentrism. They imposed their warped beliefs on the barrel of gun - as the ISIS do across the Middle East. Their totalitarianism and egotism, which rooted in their spurious faith, resulted in a whole can of worms. The voices, raised for rights or freedom, were repressed. Women lost their spouses and children were orphaned, mostly for having a certain type of beliefs, and many families were left without bread-bringer. Such cruelties are known internationally and the history keeps bleeding with the painful wounds.

However, after the downfall of the Taliban's regime, the inchoate democracy seemed a panacea for the problems and Afghans hoped and prayed for the best. The strident discourse for human rights, freedom, etc. resounded across the country and people exulted over the fall of those who threatened their lives and liberties. To put in succinct, the eyes of Afghan citizens were flashing with hope and exultation.

Ill-fatedly, this hope did not last long and Afghans suffered casualties by roadside bombs, suicide attacks, etc. carried out by the militants. This fear loomed large with each passing day and today has changed into a highly worrisome issue. The attempts of Karzai's government, within the last decade, to establish peace were proved abortive. Karzai left no stone unturned to bring Taliban into the table of negotiation. He knocked on every door, condoned the militants' violent behaviors via releasing them from Bagram prison and travelled to Pakistan 21 times but none gave the desired fruit. Karzai's flexible attitude on the face of Taliban's adamant animosity was really surprising. The national and international counterterrorism strategies could not alleviate the problems and failed to establish peace across the country. Now, the peace platitude has come to light once more and the Unity Government tries its chance. It is too early to judge whether the struggle of the new government come to fruition. What Afghan citizens want is the eradication of sectarianism and terrorism and institutionalization of equal rights, irrespective of color, race, sex or belief, on the basis of a democratic government. Prayerfully, the new government will take an effective strategy to end the bedlam of insecurity and cultivate a sense of brotherhood among all citizens.

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## The Wrath of Severe Weather

By Dilawar Sherzai

The rain and snowfall this year are considered to be late but they still have shown the same intensity and have struck Afghanistan hard in certain provinces. Particularly, the northern and central provinces, as usual, are among the most affected areas. Badakhshan and Panjshir are the most unfortunate ones. According to news reports on February 25, 72 people were confirmed dead after gigantic avalanches buried more than 100 people alive in central Panjshir province. Abdul Rahman Kabiri, the acting governor of the province, has revealed that of 106 people, 18 were rescued while around the same number of people is still missing. 30 people were killed by avalanches in the Arghach area in Abdullah Khel Dara region of Paryan district and 13 people lost their lives near Parakh, the provincial capital. The dead included women and children. Another three people were killed in the Kojan area of Paryan district after five people were buried by snow in their home. The remaining two were still missing. Another 10 people among a group of 35 people buried in snow were frozen to death in the Hessa Awal district last night, while 10 of them were rescued in injured condition and the remaining five were still missing as of Wednesday afternoon. Another four people were killed when an avalanche hit a house in the Khanj area of the Hessa Awal district and two more were killed in the Safed Chahr area of the district. Seventeen people died in the Paryan district's Pas Mazar area after avalanches buried several homes.

The snow also hit the central provinces and according to the news reports four members of a family were killed in Yakawlang district of central Bamyan province when an avalanche, ill-fatedly, hit their house.

Rain and snowfall are considered to be a blessing as they provide for water requirements but in Afghanistan, particularly, the blessing seems to be turning into a curse. It is believed that the countries and the people with limited resources and unpreparedness seem to suffer more than expected when they face any natural disaster. Same is the case with Afghanistan; the current floods and avalanches in certain parts of the country have taken many lives that could be saved. As, there is no effective mechanism to respond to the emergencies in most of the remote areas of the country, the disasters have proved to be gigantic and the poor people have suffered misery and agony. It is really tragic in Afghanistan that common Afghan people have not only been victimized by the wars and conflicts but natural disasters have also made their lives fragile. Whether it is flood, avalanches, famine or even earthquake, the severest of the shocks shake the existence of the poor and

destitute. They are the most effected, in two different ways. First, they do not possess a strong and reliable shelter and other facilities that can safeguard them against the natural disasters, which make them easy victims. Second, the facilities that should be there after the disaster to minimize the level of destruction, never reach them, as they are at the remotest of the areas.

Leave the disaster aside, even when there are severe weather conditions, which cannot be even termed as disasters; the loss of life and property incurred by the poor Afghans is really immense. Last year as well the severe cold weather victimized many poor people as they did not have enough capacity to secure themselves. As the people in the affected areas, because of their wretched and torn shelters and no fuel or wood to burn, were being victimized, there was no support from the relevant officials to provide them the facilities to fight against the death. The result was misery.

And when the severe cold weather turned into disasters in the form of avalanches in some parts of country, the incapacity of the government to help its people out of the disaster was exposed to a large extent. There are many lives that can be saved through proper and timely efforts. Moreover, there are many other areas as well that are necessary to be given proper attention by the government so that such disasters and incidents should be properly handled. Among them making a very well-equipped and properly trained disaster management unit is the most important one. At the same time making the different parts of country accessible through proper roads is also an important one.

Many places happen to be in the remotest of the areas, where the rescue teams and equipment take a very lengthy time to reach as there are no proper roads. Though security has been the most dominant issue in Afghanistan, there are many other issues as well that kill more people than the lack of security. The proper attention of the government in that regard and its services can save many lives. It requires to institutionalize its efforts and put to practice National Disaster Management Plan. Department for Disaster Preparedness must be made fully functional and must be equipped and capacitated enough to carry out its responsibilities during and even before disasters. The developed countries of the world, through institutionalized efforts, have minimized the risks of disasters and have the capacity to react rapidly when such disasters take place and thus save the valuable lives of its people as much as possible. Therefore, the government of Afghanistan must also pay consideration and concentration in such areas and must make sure that poor people do not lose their lives worthlessly.

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