

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



January 03, 2017

## Education Sector Requires Immediate Attention

Education is one of the sectors that have been influenced to a large extent in Afghanistan, both by the prevailing insecurity and the negligence of the relevant authorities. Education could have been one of the most vital weapon in Afghanistan to fight against terrorism and extremism, but no serious efforts were made to make it so. Therefore, development in education sector has not been extra-ordinary and mostly the improvements can be seen in the urban parts of the country while the distant districts still remain distant from education, particularly, quality higher education.

Insecurity have haunted schools in various ways and has proved to be the most dominant hurdle. Taliban insurgents have bombed the schools, shut them forcefully, targeted the teachers and students, attacked the students with acid particularly the female students, poisoned them and discouraged modern education in every possible manner. Even nowadays, in many parts of the country schools are being shut down because of lack of the security and sufficient facilities.

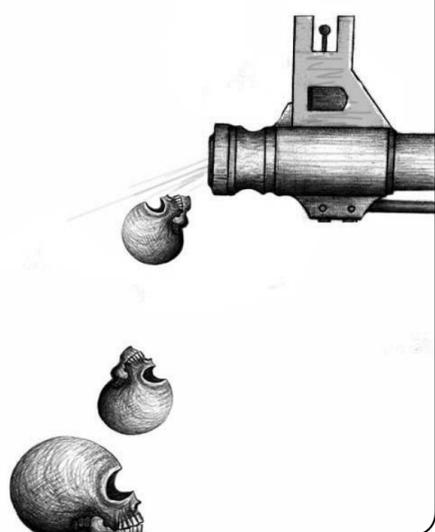
Pointing towards the same fact, acting minister of education, Asadullah Mohaqiq, on Sunday, December 01, revealed in his speech in Meshrano Jirga that more than 1,000 schools are closed across the country due to insecurity. He also claimed that the lack of text books and qualified teachers was a major problem and nearly 40,000 teachers were needed for the new school year across the country.

Previously, the Ministry of Education had also disclosed that only six million Afghan children are at school, which is contrary to the 11 million claimed by the former government.

This is really pathetic and shows how such an important sector is being influenced by prevailing insecurity and lack of due concentration and attention by authoritative individuals within the society. Moreover, it is also tragic to find that there is no hesitation in practicing corruption even in the education, which otherwise should be considered sacred and beyond corruption. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to find that the authorities are now at least ready to accept the challenges that are being faced by the country regarding education. Only after accepting the prevailing realities can the authorities sit together and develop policies to counter the challenges. However, this is largely dependent on the will of the authorities to do so. It has been found that the people who are supporting modern education within Afghanistan and are making tangible efforts for it are not in a large number.

On the contrary, 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. National Unity Government (NUG) during its initial days had made promises that there would be efforts directed towards uplifting the standard of modern education and making education accessible to more number of people; nevertheless, there are no true headways in that regard. Most of the policies of the government are in limbo as the ministries are not able to perform well and several of the ministers have already been declared disqualified by the parliament. Thus, the institutional arrangements that could play some role in improving the education system within the country is, as a matter of fact, non-existent. Government requires diverting its attention to this particular issue before it is able to make promises and suggest the ways of fighting with the serious condition of education sector.



## ISIL – The Crux of Global Challenge

By Hujjatullah Zia

The self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has changed into a global threat and blackmails the entire world. The civil unrest and political tensions in Iraq and Syria paved the ground for the emergence of ISIL and left them a free room for practicing their radical ideology. The violence and bloodshed caused by ISIL group outraged the public conscience and spread a sense of fear around the globe. The group spilt the blood of people, including women and children, on the grounds of their race, color and creed and sought to stoke sectarian violence.

Yazidi women fell victim to the radical mindsets of ISIL fighters and their rights and dignity were trampled upon, on the basis of their racial and religious backgrounds. Moreover, humanitarian law was violated in the worst possible way as women were raped, children were killed and detainees and the wounded were tortured painfully. Within the last year (2016), the ISIL fighters inflicted heavy casualties upon Syrian and Iraqi nations.

In a nutshell, this group capitalized on political turmoil and took control of large swathes of Syria and Iraq, where it proclaimed the creation of a "caliphate" in June 2014. Its many foreign fighters are involved in a "war within a war" in Syria. From the declaration of the caliphate until early 2016, some 90 terrorist attacks were either carried out or inspired by ISIL in 21 countries around the globe, from California to Sydney, that left large casualties behind.

Ten months after vowing to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the organization, the US President Barack Obama ruefully acknowledged that ISIL "has been particularly effective at reaching out to and recruiting vulnerable people around the world including here in the United States, and they are targeting Muslim communities around the world." He added, "Ideologies are not defeated with guns, they are defeated by better ideas, a more attractive and more compelling vision."

Sustaining large casualties under Russia's heavy attacks, it was believed that the ISIL would be rooted out and the world would heave a sigh of relief in 2017. However, the deadly attack at Istanbul's Reina club during New Year's celebrations, which left 39 dead and 70 wounded, shattered the public hope for a peaceful year.

Of the 21 dead identified so far, 15 were foreigners. Nationals of Saudi Arabia, India, Morocco, Israel, Lebanon, Belgium and Libya were among those killed. The bloodiest attacks that Turkey endured in 2016 were the work of ISIL or outlawed Kurdish fighters.

Moreover, the ISIL fighters will continue their militancy and suicide bombings in Iraq. The recapture of Mosul would probably spell the end for the group's self-styled caliphate in it areas seized in 2014, but ISIL would still be capable of fighting a guerrilla-style insurgency in Iraq, and plotting or inspiring attacks on the West.

To one's unmitigated chagrin, the start of 2017 with the blood of innocent people reveals the tragic fact that terrorism and militancy will continue unabated. Additionally, the deadly truck rampage through a Berlin Christmas market, which was called "act of terrorism" by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, unfolds the same story.

Hence, the ISIL fighters will spew forth their venom wherever possible to shed the blood of mankind indiscriminately, be it men, women or children.

The ISIL fighters played a highly destructive role in 2016 and gained foothold in some Islamic countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. The formation of ISIL-K near the Afghan-Pak border was believed to deteriorate the security situation. The ISIL's loyalists sought to trigger a sense of sectarianism among Afghan nation through abducting and killing members of the ethnic minority group.

Of late, reports say that the ISIL group is still a serious threat to the country and is able to continue their insurgency. Overall, the ISIL group has been undermined, including in Afghanistan, and sustained large casualties; however, they still try to recruit new soldiers so as to survive.

It is really disappointing to see that ISIL has involved the world into a protracted war and challenged many countries although there has not long passed from its formation. Radicalization is on the rise and terrorist networks breed fear and hatred and violate the rights and dignity of individuals around the world, despite democratic discourses and human rights organizations.

There is much to be done by the world to dismantle the terrorist networks and destroy their sanctuaries.

It is hoped that the international community will take effective steps in combating terrorism so as to alleviate the pains and sufferings of mankind and put an end to indescribable violence and bloodshed.

Since terrorist networks, mainly the ISIL group, are global threats, a universal campaign is needed to be launched with bona fide intention of rooting them out. It is believed that if financial and political supports, which are given to the ISIL group mysteriously, be cut off, it will no more resist operating in such an organized way or under a central headquarter.

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## Charting Our AI Future

By Luciano Floridi

Galileo viewed nature as a book written in the language of mathematics and decipherable through physics. His metaphor may have been a stretch for his milieu, but not for ours. Ours is a world of digits that must be read through computer science.

It is a world in which artificial-intelligence (AI) applications perform many tasks better than we can. Like fish in water, digital technologies are our infosphere's true natives, while we analog organisms try to adapt to a new habitat, one that has come to include a mix of analog and digital components. We are sharing the infosphere with artificial agents that are increasingly smart, autonomous, and even social. Some of these agents are already right in front of us, and others are discernible on the horizon, while later generations are unforeseeable. And the most profound implication of this epochal change may be that we are most likely only at the beginning of it.

The AI agents that have already arrived come in soft forms, such as apps, web bots, algorithms, and software of all kinds; and hard forms, such as robots, driverless cars, smart watches, and other gadgets. They are replacing even white-collar workers, and performing functions that, just a few years ago, were considered off-limits for technological disruption: cataloguing images, translating documents, interpreting radiographs, flying drones, extracting new information from huge data sets, and so forth.

Digital technologies and automation have been replacing workers in agriculture and manufacturing for decades; now they are coming to the services sector. More old jobs will continue to disappear, and while we can only guess at the scale of the coming disruption, we should assume that it will be profound. Any job in which people serve as an interface – between, say, a GPS and a car, documents in different languages, ingredients and a finished dish, or symptoms and a corresponding disease – is now at risk.

But, at the same time, new jobs will appear, because we will need new interfaces between automated services, websites, AI applications, and so forth. Someone will need to ensure that the AI service's translations are accurate and reliable. What's more, many tasks will not be cost-effective for AI applications. For example, Amazon's Mechanical Turk program claims to give its customers "access to more than 500,000 workers from 190 countries," and is marketed as a form of "artificial artificial intelligence." But as the repetition indicates, the human "Turks" are performing brainless tasks, and being paid pennies.

These workers are in no position to turn down a job. The risk is that AI will only continue to polarize our societies – between haves and never-will-haves – if we do not manage its effects. It is not hard to imagine a future social hierarchy that places a few patricians above both the machines and a massive new

underclass of plebs. Meanwhile, as jobs go, so will tax revenues; and it is unlikely that the companies profiting from AI will willingly step in to support adequate social-welfare programs for their former employees.

Instead, we will have to do something to make companies pay more, perhaps with a "robo-tax" on AI applications. We should also consider legislation and regulations to keep certain jobs "human." Indeed, such measures are also why driverless trains are still rare, despite being more manageable than driverless taxis or buses.

Still, not all of AI's implications for the future are so obvious. Some old jobs will survive, even when a machine is doing most of the work: a gardener who delegates cutting the grass to a "smart" lawnmower will simply have more time to focus on other things, such as landscape design. At the same time, other tasks will be delegated back to us to perform (for free) as users, such as in the self-checkout lane at the supermarket. Another source of uncertainty concerns the point at which AI is no longer controlled by a guild of technicians and managers. What will happen when AI becomes "democratized" and is available to billions of people on their smartphones or some other device?

For starters, AI applications' smart behavior will challenge our intelligent behavior, because they will be more adaptable to the future infosphere. A world where autonomous AI systems can predict and manipulate our choices will force us to rethink the meaning of freedom. And we will have to rethink sociability as well, as artificial companions, holograms (or mere voices), 3D servants, or life-like sexbots provide attractive and possibly indistinguishable alternatives to human interaction. It is unclear how all of this will play out, but we can rest assured that new artificial agents will not confirm the scaremongers' warnings, or usher in a dystopian science-fiction scenario. Brave New World is not coming to life, and the "Terminator" is not lurking just beyond the horizon, either. We should remember that AI is almost an oxymoron: future smart technologies will be as stupid as your old car. In fact, delegating sensitive tasks to such "stupid" agents is one of the future risks.

All of these profound transformations oblige us to reflect seriously on who we are, could be, and would like to become. AI will challenge the exalted status we have conferred on our species. While I do not think that we are wrong to consider ourselves exceptional, I suspect that AI will help us identify the irreproducible, strictly human elements of our existence, and make us realize that we are exceptional only insofar as we are successfully dysfunctional. In the great software of the universe, we will remain a beautiful bug, and AI will increasingly become a normal feature. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Luciano Floridi, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics of Information at the University of Oxford, is the author, most recently, of *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*.



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