

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



July 01, 2018

Caring for the Old

Aging is an inevitable natural and biological phenomenon. There are many perceptions of the old generation varying from one culture to another. Some people have the positive views like "old is gold", or "old person in the family is a blessing", while some people think that "old is worn out" or "dead wood". In general, taking the problem from the point of views of old people themselves and the people around them, it appears that the aged are viewed as a disadvantaged group and present an acute social problem. This points out to the facts that there are negative conditions regarding aging and the aged group which call for some remedial measures for its correction. The problem apart from its psychological and social components, irrespective of the financial issues, has increased because of improvements in health/medical care and longevity in life. This has kept the aged physically and mentally young. Technology and rapid social changes have, on the other hand, made the aged isolated and worn-out.

Once the old family members were the symbol of wisdom and experience for the young, and their stay with the families were cherished. However, the growing tensions, pressures and achievement motives before the young and adults, particularly in the urban areas of the country, have made the old people burden on the families.

There is a growing need to tackle the issue seriously. There are different sorts of remedies available but more important is to pursue them properly. Both the government authorities and the people must play positive roles in this regard.

The main problem is to keep the old people occupied in one way or the other. The projects and schemes could be started by the private enterprises for the re-employment of the old people with light work of short duration, or the opening up of self-employment opportunities at the local level in small communities. This would be equally applicable both in rural and urban areas of the Afghanistan.

There is a need for the creation of voluntary services in the field of primary education like health and family welfare centers and other voluntary or non-governmental organizations at the local, regional, provincial and national levels. In this way, the old people will have a sense of belonging and contributing to the national development apart from having a sense of pride and honor with maintaining their self-respect and dignity. This would save the old persons from many socio-psychological problems. It would have very important implications on their mental health. It would be certainly better to contribute to the national development rather than simply waiting for the death and complaining against the friends, relatives and time.

The revival of friendship ties with friends, relatives and neighborhood would contribute to health past-time and establishing relationships in primary groups. The relationships within the family could be re-established by participating into the affairs of the sons/daughters and grand-children in a democratic way. This would give the old persons proper psychological satisfaction and emotional contentment, thus, enjoying the retired life in a richer and fuller way instead of total withdrawal and isolation.

Active involvement in the family/community affairs with respect to birth, death, marriage ceremonies and religious festivals would keep the old men and women active and alive and would develop a sense of participation. These social and religious activities are likely to make the old generation happy and contented with a sense of pride and honor - the best way to spending retired life.

The rest and recreational activities are the most suitable means for the old people requiring in active participation. Radio and TV could play an important role in presenting national and international sports events on major and minor games regularly. Same is the case for providing indoor games for the old people. Even participation in local 'meals' would be of much significance to the old people. Such indoor sports and games could be arranged under the shade of a tree, or any other common place. In short, the involvement in community affairs even inter-community affairs would be of much use for the old people where their life-long experiences and wisdom could be utilized by the younger generation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a source of mental satisfaction for the old people.

Establishing old age houses and even small villages and centers for the mentally and physically handicapped is another solution for problems of old people in urban areas. The poor, unwanted and rejected old people could live there and spend the remaining days of their lives at these places in a meaningful way rather than having an empty life in isolation with a deep sense of inferiority complex.

Last but not the least, regular visits to old family friends and relatives, coupled with frequent travel to various parts of the country in groups would be yet another means of spending old-days in a fruitful way. These frequent visits and traveling with change in environment would certainly help in decreasing their tensions and frustration for some time. It would be better if these visits and travels are made every season or year with close old age friends and relatives.



Insecurity & Target Killings Limits the Ability of Candidates and Voters to Participate in Elections in Kunduz Province

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Residents of Kunduz province, including Kunduz city and all provincial districts, have been confined to smaller population centers and are facing existential threats from armed insurgents in the province because of their participation in the upcoming elections. Major population centers are disconnected from each other due to prevailing insecurity. Roads are infested with gunmen who randomly check vehicles and passengers and select people at will for persecution and execution. Insurgents have established their writ on major districts and population centers and reign by will in those areas. Government writ has evaporated from most of the population centers in the province. Districts of Chardara, Archi and Qala-e-Zal are nominally run by government. Only district buildings are controlled by government in these districts. Insurgents can strike at will and in any time to destabilize the province due to their close proximity to roads and major military and police bases, and their control over large swath of agricultural and populated areas in rural countryside provide them with planning and retreat space, resource generation, conscription of young people in their rank and military maneuvering. Insurgents have established a shadowy, de facto government in the province that regulate most activities in the province - including working hours of mobile phone companies, who are order not to operate antennas from 4pm till 6am. They have effectively used fear and fright to implement their agendas.

On 4 June 2018, a young man was shot eight times near his home, but he survived the attack, hospitalized. On 2 June, two persons were killed by Taliban in Nowabad area, Chardara district for taking part in elections campaign. On 1 May, three people were gunned down in the midst of day light in Kunduz city, two of them were local police personnel and one was a shopkeeper. On 30 May, two more people were killed in the outskirts of Kunduz city for participating in elections campaign. Also, on 28 May, two more people were killed in Zakhel area of Kunduz city because of their participation in elections campaign. On the night of 3 June, four armed people entered the house of a district council candidate for the kill, but after short skirmishes the target managed to escape with the help of his neighbors. There has been reports of twelve more incidents of target killing, abduction and death threats to candidates and members of their campaign contributors as of 29 June 2018. Leaflets disseminated by Taliban on 3rd June warned people 'if anyone voted in elections will be punished and those caught campaigning will be killed...' This situation has exacerbated voters' and candidates' plight to register as voters and candidates in the province. Insurgents have taken hard line and are all out to disrupt and fail ongoing electoral process and elections in the province. They have free hands to do so because of their unchallenged behavior and killing of innocent civilians. People in Kunduz believe that special squads with duty to target and kill selective people in cities, sanctioned by Taliban leadership council in the province, are operating in government controlled areas. These conditions have sapped people's resolve to vote.

A province with total population of more than 1.2 million people can only register one hundred thousand (ten percent up or down) to participate in elections by the time voters' and candidates' registration process is over.

This figure indicates less than ten percent of total population, which puts at stake the very eligibility of the elections. As if all these issues are not enough, powerful candidates who are already members of parliament, use their official protocol and title to use provincial security personnel - including police and army - to provide relative security at their constituencies for people to register and vote at the expense of national exchequer to suit their personal end. It is a shame that there are no mechanisms to put a check on such misuse of power and government resources by existing members of parliament in the province. IEC should take note of such behavior and coordinate with provincial governor and chief security officials including independent international and national observers to prevent these practices. Provision of security and other services by government should be prevalent and target all citizens - NOT PRIVILEGED few. Continuation of such practices can only make way for corrupt and privileged few to take advantage of the present situation and to continue to grab to power in the next parliament. Ordinary people have noted this diagonal government services and are already making guesses as to who will be the winners!

It is incumbent on government to coordinate with IEC all security measures in the province and make effective plan to push the boundary of government controlled areas wider and deep inside the rebel held territory - especially in districts such as Chardara, Khanabad and Qalai Zal where security situation is worse. The Corps Commander, Police Chief, Intelligence Chief and Governor should take heed of the situation and plan for military operations in these districts at the earliest. They should agree on a joint working committee meeting that should be held weekly to take stock of the progress made on weekly basis. Kunduz province has got special attention of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan last year when the city fell to insurgents' hands. Since then, there are enough resources in the province to utilize to bring normality and security in the province. It is out of anybody's guess that how can the Government leave large swath of densely populated and agricultural areas in control and at the mercy of insurgents in the province. It is anybody's guess that at prevailing situation, it is insurgents' call to disrupt and make chaos in the province at time and place of their own choosing. This means, insurgents are positioned at advantageous and strategic locations. One can easily observe government security posts and army bunkers dug deep along the road, and only hundred meters away in the fields are insurgents roaming freely. People are good observers and can make judgment about the prevailing situation in the country by keeping in view the psychology of forces at play in the field, so they decide which way to lean hard when it comes to obeying orders and rules. Government should proclaim supremacy by seriously facing up to threats and enemy challenges so that people can trust them. At this point in time when it comes to trust, Government is bankrupt. Kunduz province is at precarious situation, and Government needs to take necessary measures to stabilize the province.

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Shooting Oneself in One's Own Foot: Pakistan's Failed Effort to Evade Terrorism Finance Listing

By James M. Dorsey

The Pakistani government's removal of a virulently anti-Shiite militant from its terrorism list at the very moment that an international money laundering and terrorism finance watchdog was deciding to put the country on a watchlist highlights Pakistan's struggle to come to grips with militancy.

The decision by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) that was reported by Pakistani media but has yet to be announced by the group itself also puts China's ambiguous attitude towards Pakistani militants on the spot. It further raises questions about attitudes of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia attitude towards Pakistani militants.

Like China, Saudi Arabia has adopted contradictory attitudes towards Pakistani militants, supporting those that serve its geopolitical objectives while seeking to neutralize militants that either threaten its interests or are of little value to the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia and China paved the way for this week's decision to put Pakistan on FATF's grey list by acquiescing in February to a FATF decision to give Pakistan three months to clean up its act.

The grey listing means that Pakistan's financial system will be designated as posing a risk to the international financial system because of "strategic deficiencies" in its ability to prevent terror financing and money laundering.

Pakistani officials downplayed the significance of the grey listing, noting that the country was able to float international bonds, borrow from multilateral bodies, receive or send remittances or conduct international trade when it was listed between 2012 and 2015.

In March, then finance minister Miftah Ismail told the national assembly that the listing would not affect Pakistan's economy and at best cause the country embarrassment.

Pakistan, nevertheless, sought to evade listing by issuing this month a directive that strengthened its anti-money laundering and terrorism finance controls.

The government earlier cracked down on entities associated with Hafez Saeed, an internationally designated terrorist, who is believed to be responsible for the 2008 attacks in Mumbai in which more than 160 people were killed.

Pakistani officials suggested that they had evaded blacklisting by presenting a 26-point action plan that would address FATF's concerns in the next 15 months.

The plan promised that Pakistan would share with FATF its steps to counter the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the Haqqani network; efforts to halt the transfer of funds to militants via couriers; work to enhance the capacity of prosecutors; and moves against illegal money changers and cross border smuggling of currency.

The Pakistani effort however did not stop the government from removing Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi, the head of Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), from its terrorism list on the day that FATF was discussing Pakistan in Paris.

ASWJ, which is fielding dozens of candidates for Pakistan's July 25 elections, is the successor of long-banned Sipah-e-Sahaba, a virulently anti-Shiite group that has close ties to Saudi Arabia.

"Some things are natural. It's like when two Pakistanis meet abroad or someone from Jhang meets another person from Jhang in Karachi. It's natural to be closest to the people with whom we have similarities... We are the biggest anti-Shiite movement in Pakistan," Mr. Ludhianvi said in 2016 over a lunch of chicken, vegetables and rice.

Mr. Ludhianvi sits at the intersection of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's two-pronged attitude towards militancy.

Madrasas or religious seminaries operated by ASWJ in the Pakistani province of Balochistan that borders on Iran have benefited from an injection of funds from the kingdom in the last two years, according to militants.

The source of the Saudi funding remains unclear but is believed to have tacit government support despite Prince Mohammed's propagation of an undefined form of moderate Islam, a cutback in Saudi funding of ultra-conservative Sunni Muslims worldwide, and the kingdom's stepping up its economic cooperation with Afghanistan in a bid to isolate both Iran and the Taliban.

Saudi ambiguity is matched by a similar Chinese haziness in its attitude toward Pakistani militants.

China's sincerity will be put to the test when later this year the United Nations Security Council is likely to again debate designating Masoud Azhar, a fighter in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s and an Islamic scholar who is believed to have been responsible for an attack in 2016 on India's Pathankot Air Force Station, as a terrorist.

China has repeatedly vetoed Mr. Azhar's designation. China shielded Mr. Saeed from being listed by the UN prior to the Mumbai attacks.

Men like Messrs. Saeed and Azhar serve China's interest of keeping India off balance as well as the People's Republic's relations with the powerful Pakistani military, which it views as a more reliable partner than Pakistan's unruly and rambunctious politicians.

Complicating the equation is the fact that Chinese and Saudi selective support for Pakistani militants works at cross purposes.

China's focus on India does not threaten Saudi interests but Saudi support of anti-Shiite militants in a region that is key to China's US\$50 billion Belt and Road relative investment in Pakistan could put Balochistan's already fragile security at risk.

The question is whether Saudi and Chinese acquiescence in FATF's grey listing of Pakistan signals that the two countries may have second thoughts about their ambiguous approaches to Pakistani militants. If so, that may be the key to untying Pakistan's knots in its struggle with militancy.

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