

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



July 12, 2017

Managing Natural Disasters

It is not only terrorism that has influenced the people of Afghanistan; there are many other issues as well that have largely disturbed the people, and will keep on doing so unless there are measures carried out to control them. In some cases, the government has the capacity to show its role and effectiveness while in some others it needs to wait before it can acquire the capabilities.

However, in the cases where it can play its role, it has been dormant and not shown any considerable responsibility. One of the same issues is a lackluster response to natural disasters. Though natural disasters are mostly unpredictable and cannot be stopped, different measures can be carried out to limit their influences and damages, if any.

Almost every year, floods victimize people in different parts of Afghanistan. On Tuesday, official from Badakhshan province confirmed that floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains left 5 people dead and another 25 wounded in two districts of northeastern Badakhshan province. As per the statement by Nasi district chief, the rains-induced flooding in four villages of the district and had destroyed and inundated 61 residential homes and partially damaged 42 others.

Many people fled from their homes and moved to high areas and mountains in neighboring villages to save their lives but they were currently facing shortage of food.

As Afghanistan is suffering from limited resources and unpreparedness people seem to suffer more than expected when they face any natural disaster. The current floods in Badakhshan have taken the 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 always prove to be gigantic and the poor people mostly suffer 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 the 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. Almost every year severe cold weather victimize many poor people as they do 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, are victimized, there is no support from the relevant officials to provide them the facilities to fight against the death. The result is misery. And when the severe cold weather turn 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 is 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.



Observing Humanitarian Law in Afghanistan's Internal Conflicts

By Abdul Hamid Arifi

The social life of human beings has begun with conflict and was beset by destructive war and skirmish throughout the history. War was an indispensable fact for mankind. On the other hand, war has been painful and followed by human rights violation, mainly in armed conflicts within the recent centuries as war took place in the deadliest possible way. War and violence, especially in internal armed conflicts in various countries including Afghanistan, resulted in great catastrophe, gory incident and violation of human dignity – these all happened in civil armed conflicts.

According to human rights international instruments and humanitarian law, it is an obligation on warring sides, be it national or international, to observe humanitarian law and are not supposed to violate it in any conditions. Therefore, the binding international principles are stressed in the international humanitarian law. Respecting this international instrument and the main reason behind underlining these principles are to protect the non-combatant individuals who sit on the fence. So, restricting the rule of war, forbidding acting upon humiliating violence and using certain weaponry in armed conflicts and reducing the pain and sufferings of mankind during conflicts are the essential objectives of humanitarian law. It is stressed in Geneva Conventions – comprises of four treaties – second additional protocol and rules of the international community that warring sides will have to observe the humanitarian law in international and internal armed conflicts.

It was further stated that disregarding the international humanitarian law is not allowed and will be considered a flagrant violation of human rights and humanitarian law. So, many practices are forbidden such as violent treatment to one's life, especially any kind of killing, mutilation, torture or physical torment, violating one's dignity and humiliation, rape, forcing to prostitution, and any kind of actions against self-esteem, using human shield, abduction, terrorist acts, massacre and collective torture, looting public properties, destroying cities and places, issuing decree for non-combatants' displacement, sabotaging or looting public or private estates or of the opponent party, targeting civilians or their residence, etc. Moreover, warring sides have to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. Targeting local residence or civilians' properties are prohibited. It is emphasized in international humanitarian law that locals must not be attacked and violent acts and threat with the intention of spreading fear and horror among civilians are prohibited.

The aforementioned rules based on human rights values and binding international humanitarian law were endorsed with the aim of protecting human rights values of mankind around human societies. A number of principles is stated are funda-

mental and must be observed by warring sides in international and internal armed conflicts. The mentioned principles are: the principles of human dignity, restriction in using banned arms and chemical weapons, distinction between soldiers and civilians, prohibition of inflicting extreme pain and suffering, protecting environment, etc. Hence, warring sides are responsible to consider the aforementioned rules and differentiate between civilians and soldiers and military targets from civilians. They are not allowed to damage public properties and should notice that targeting civilians, mainly women and children, and transgressing the said principles in war will be war crime. Humanitarian law seeks to reduce violent practices and prevent from anti-human acts. Unluckily, the principles of international humanitarian law has been ignored in Afghanistan's civil conflicts and its violation is widespread. Warring sides transgressed them in different parts of the country. For instance, killing and beheading innocent civilians, including women and children, targeting non-combatants, rape, using human as defensive shield, abduction, targeting religious and educational centers, destroying hospitals, sabotaging and seizing private and public properties, causing civilian displacement, threatening the media and menacing human rights defenders are the flagrant violation of humanitarian law in Afghanistan.

Report released by Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission also reflects the violation of humanitarian law in the country which mostly includes civilian casualties, mainly last year, which was considered the deadliest year as thousands of people were the victims of war. Suicide attacks, ground conflicts, death and terror, improvised explosive device (IED) and rocket firing led to heaviest civilian fatalities. Thus, it is imperative that warring sides and anti-government armed parties pay heed to their responsibilities, respect humanitarian law, and realize that the violators of these rules deserve to be prosecuted for justice.

In brief, the anti-government armed parties should be attentive enough that killing civilians and damaging their properties are prohibited and they have to stop abducting, terrorizing and killing travelers, killing local influential figures, and conducting desert court. Afghan government is seeking to investigate human rights violations in internal armed conflict and identify those who violate them and prosecute them for justice. Considering the aforementioned rules and principles, the Afghan government intends to protect the life, dignity and property of civilians and cooperate with the International Criminal Court in relation to dealing with international human rights violation and submit documents and evidence related to war crime to the court.

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Asia's Future Farms

By Mahfuz Ahmed

Food shortages are a distant memory for many people in Asia. But as the region struggles to feed and nourish a booming population, they could become a painful fact of life again.

Asia is already the world's largest food market, and by 2050 its population is expected to grow to five billion – an increase of 900 million people. Owing to its expanding middle class, the region will likely account for half of the global increase in annual beef and poultry consumption and over three quarters of the rise in fish consumption between now and 2030. And by then, more than 60% of total cereal demand in the developing world will come from South and East Asia. To keep up with this growing demand, food production will have to increase by 60-70% compared to a decade ago.

Ideally, Asia's farms could simply expand their production. But they are woefully ill-equipped to do so. To produce a sufficient amount of food, Asia's farms will need to undergo a twenty-first-century transformation.

Helping Asia's farmers cope with climate change should be a central part of this effort. Although a warming planet could boost agricultural output in a few areas, it will severely limit production, and possibly trigger prolonged food crises, throughout the rest of the region. As water becomes increasingly scarce in traditionally fertile zones such as the Indo-Gangetic Plain, rising seas will ruin vast swathes of farmland. If sea levels were to rise by one meter, the resulting saltwater intrusion would threaten 70% of Vietnam's coastal farmlands. And as waters warm and tidal flows change, yields from the Mekong Delta's vast fishing grounds could plummet.

According to Asian Development Bank research, by 2050, irrigated rice and wheat yields could fall by as much as 20% and 44%, respectively. This would drive up the price for cereals, soybeans, and wheat by 70%, causing the number of malnourished children in the region to rise by 11 million.

But this doesn't have to be Asia's future, if its farmers can adapt. Most farmers today oversee family-run subsistence plots, and lack the money and know-how to improve productivity and crop quality. In Myanmar, for example, only 16% of farm households even use tillers or tractors to prepare the land for planting.

Moreover, environmental degradation has left huge swaths of land barren. According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, various forms of desertification affect nearly 40% of Asia's total land area. While governments cannot create new arable land, they can – and must – pursue policies to support, consolidate, and intensify farming operations on the land that is still available.

For starters, the region's governments can promote farm cooperatives. Not to be confused with old-style collectivized farming, today's cooperatives are thoroughly commercial, prioritizing efficiency and profits. They comprise agricultural

enterprises as well as farmers, all of whom pool their resources to create economies of scale, reduce costs, and lift incomes. When bought in bulk by a cooperative, inputs such as fertilizer and equipment are less expensive, as is the harvesting process. By coming together to coordinate planting, cooperatives in India and Nepal have made it possible for every member's crops to be sown and harvested together by a machine, rather than individually by hand.

Cooperatives can also add value after the harvest, by streamlining crop cleaning, grading, packaging, storage, and transportation. This increases the supply of food and boosts farmers' incomes, especially in places such as Bangladesh, where more than one-third of perishables spoil before ever reaching the consumer.

China is already modernizing farms through cooperatives, and by using digital e-commerce platforms to tap into high-value markets. In Vietnam, a cooperative program has improved the quality of produce for urban consumers, and boosted tea, fruit, and vegetable revenues by nearly one third. Although cooperatives are gradually catching on in Asia, they will need more support. Most of the region's cooperatives are fragile, informal arrangements. But with the right legal framework in place, they could become far more efficient and durable.

China's 2007 Farmers' Cooperative Law serves as a good model. By offering incentives such as value-added-tax exemptions, the law has encouraged cooperatives and other agricultural organizations to collaborate and create economies of scale. Within three years of the law's enactment, the number of cooperatives in China had increased ninefold, to nearly 400,000.

Cooperatives also help farmers manage the effects of climate change, by creating networks through which members can share knowledge about tricky adaptive strategies like switching from crops to fish or shrimp in saline-affected areas. And with the extra income that cooperatives provide, farmers can buy greenhouses to prolong their production season, and shield against erratic weather. Cooperatives also allow farmers to benefit from previously unavailable techniques such as fertigation – using irrigation to deliver liquid fertilizers.

Finally, cooperatives make climate-smart technologies more affordable. With new digital technologies, farmers can better manage their land, water, and energy use, and prepare for bad weather. For example, the Philippines has experimented with apps that give farmers news about plant and animal diseases, the best places to buy and sell farm supplies, and upcoming weather events.

By using less labor, and more capital and technology, Asia's future farms can grow enough food to feed everyone in the region. Cooperatives are one way to make this vision a reality. Only then will food shortages truly be a thing of the past. Mahfuz Ahmed is an adviser at the Asian Development Bank on agriculture, rural development, and food security

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