

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



July 30, 2016

## Atrocities against Women Keep on Multiplying

The discrimination, atrocities and violence against women still continue in Afghanistan and unfortunately only few of such cases are highlighted. On many occasions such cases are never brought to the attention of the people as they do not get the chance of being disseminated through media. Most of the people in Afghan society never consider it a crime or a non-ethical act if women are beaten, or treated as inferior. There are only few who care and they, also, are not in the position to take practical measures to stop such atrocities.

The cases that are highlighted through media also do not get the guarantee of being pursued with honest intentions. Such cases become the headlines in the newspapers and news channels only to depict that Afghan society believes in giving proper coverage to the issues of women. After few days, they are again forgotten. In some cases, there may be promises by the government authorities that action would be taken against the culprits but those promises mostly remain empty promises. In rare cases even if the issue is pursued and brought to justice, the influential men stand above the law. They turn the justice in their favor through wealth, influence and even misuse of power. Therefore, such incidents keep on happening and would continue unless there are true intentions to stop them.

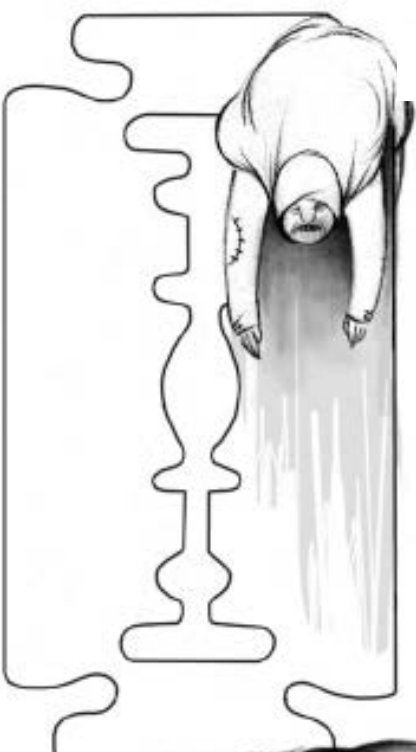
Few such incidents were highlighted by media recently - on Friday, a 22-year-old woman, Gul Jan, was shot dead by unknown gunmen in Pashtunkot district of Faryab province for having alleged relations with a man over the telephone. Provincial police spokesman Abdul Karim Yurish confirmed that the woman was married and the incident took place as her husband is in Iran for work.

On Wednesday this week, a woman in Takhar province lost her unborn baby after her husband tortured her and mutilated her genitals. Earlier a woman was shot dead by her relatives as she was trying to elope with a man in western Ghor province of Afghanistan. The woman was identified as Aziz Gul and was shot dead in Ahangaran area of Ghor in mid-June this year. A teenage girl was also burnt alive by her brother's wife in eastern Nangarhar province of Afghanistan earlier last month, while three sisters were shot dead, allegedly by the militants in Logar province.

There is a clear rise in incidents of violence against women. This is directly linked to the overall security situation. As the security situation in the country has deteriorated the weaker strata seem to be in trouble the most. There were no serious attention to their woes and now with rising insecurity, the authorities have more excuses for less attention to the issues of women. Women and many intellectuals believe that even if the security situation improves there will be serious challenges for women to earn a reputable position within Afghan society. Even if there is a peace deal with Taliban, there are fears that Afghan government may sacrifice some of the achievements that are made regarding the heightened role and position of women. Taliban have never been in favor of active role of women in social and political lives and one of their conditions for peace talks would be limiting their role as much as possible. Keeping the Afghan society in mind, the authorities may accept such a condition.

Afghan social structure has been fervently dominated by religious extremism and tribal partiality. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Regrettably, these norms and principles have even gone to the extent of aggression and have tortured women physically - even in the public. They, in the name of dignity of women, have in reality dishonored them. Though they have been raising their voices every now and then but in the noise of male shrieks they seem to be negligible and get faded away. In fact, the male-chauvinistic ears are not ready to hear them though they feel their vibrations clearly. Nonetheless, the efforts in this regard must never be given up and they should continue in every possible way.

With such a situation existing around, it is really difficult to see development in condition of women who have been undergoing discriminations since ages. Afghan authorities and all the Afghan people, both women and men, must strive to change the scenario as it would help the society as a whole as women are an essential part of it. We need to accept that women form an integral part of society and have an imperative role to play. Their representation and participation in different walks of life can help society develop suitably. They cannot be kept on being discriminated and violated without letting up, because it is not only non-religious but at the same time atrocious because above all women are human beings. Unfortunately, this evident fact has not been realized by many in Afghan society.



## The Vulnerability of Afghan Civilians to Escalated Militancy

By Hujjatullah Zia

The surge in militancy has resulted in heavy casualties and Afghan civilians are left at the mercy of serious violence and bloodshed. A spate of terrorist attacks carried out by the Taliban and self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) led to indiscriminate killings. The escalated insurgency on the one hand and political wheeling and dealing on the other hand have filled the air with a sense of fear and disappointment and Afghans do not have peace of mind in their collective life - this demonstrates the fact that security goes from bad to worse.

Afghanistan has left a checkered past behind. The civil unrest, Taliban's regime and the post-Taliban period are the significant milestones in our history. During the Taliban's regime, people's rights and liberty were trampled upon to a great extent. Life was highly cheap and the country was controlled at gunpoint. The Taliban fighters did not only ignore religious tenets and ethical code but also international law. They persisted only in their dogmatic ideology - which discriminated people on the grounds of their race, sex, color and creed. After all, articles of war and humanitarian law were never considered, therefore, women, children and war prisoners were killed in cold blood. Perhaps, anything was valuable but human rights and liberty.

However, following the 9/11, as the US launched "the war on terror" in Afghanistan to root out terrorism, a sense of hope filled the air and people wished to embrace democracy. The public believed that with the establishment of a democratic state, they would be able to exercise their rights and liberty. Therefore, they heaved a sigh of relief and hoped for the utopia, which was supposed to be void of violence and bloodshed. To put it succinctly, the downfall of the Taliban's regime was deemed an end to the merciless death of Afghan men, women and children. So, people welcomed American forces with open arms for demolishing a cruel regime.

With the fall of the Taliban's regime, Afghan representatives approved the Constitution on Jan. 03, 2004. The Constitution - which contained men's dignity and their rights to life, liberty and property - was a landmark in our history. Moreover, presidential and parliamentary elections strengthened the democracy and brought greater hope for the public.

Since the Taliban's ragtag militants sought sanctuary across the border, Afghan nation celebrated democracy and in their dream utopia. To their unmitigated chagrin, the peace and stability did not last long and the Taliban were reorganized and staged attacks against the Afghan and US forces. Similarly, Afghans' utopian world changed into dystopia as their rights and liberty became susceptible to violence with the

militants' resurface. The instability compounded with the passage of time and challenged the "war on terror". Afghan men, women and children again found themselves prone to terrorism and lost their lives in suicide attacks and improvised explosives devices (IED) every now and then.

Within the last two years, the security situation worsened and a large number of Afghan civilians lost their lives or were amputated as a result of the Taliban's attacks. Based on the UN's recent report, at least 1,601 civilian have been killed and 3,565 others wounded in the first half of the current year, showing a record surge of four percent compared to the same period in 2015. The total civilian casualty figures recorded between January 2009 and June 30, 2016 have risen to 22,941 deaths and 40,993 injuries, the recent attack which left dozens dead and hundreds wounded in Saturday's demonstration in Kabul is not included in the report. According to UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), this year's death toll included 1,509 children (388 dead and 1,121 wounded) - the highest numbers of children killed or wounded in a six-month period since 2009. Taliban and other anti-government outfits were blamed for at least 60 percent of the non-combatants' casualties, Afghan forces for 22 percent and the NATO troops for 2 percent, however, 17 percent could not be attributed to any warring parties.

The UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, demanded an end to violence against civilians in Afghanistan. He said that the warring parties had to put an end to the deliberate attacks on innocent civilians and the use of heavy weapons in densely populated areas.

The UN report and statements by the High Commissioner for Human Rights came just two days after the suicide attack, in a peaceful demonstration in Kabul, which left more than 300 dead and wounded behind - women and children were also among the casualties - for which the ISIL claimed responsibility and also warned to intensify their attacks against Shia Muslims in the country. The ISIL constantly sought to fuel sectarian violence across the Islamic world, including Afghanistan. With the emergence of the ISIL group and escalation in Taliban's offensives, the civilian casualties will continue unabated. The spate of the Taliban's attacks reflect that their newly appointed leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, is the sworn enemy of Afghan nation and a radical ideologue who intends to destabilize Afghanistan more than ever before. Afghan and U.S. forces have no option other than showing backlash against the militancy - be it from the Taliban or ISIL militants - through intensifying strikes.

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## The Arab World's Water Insecurity

By Brahma Chellaney

Nowhere is freshwater scarcer than in the Arab world. The region is home to most of the world's poorest states or territories in terms of water resources, including Bahrain, Djibouti, Gaza, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. This shortage - exacerbated by exploding populations, depletion and degradation of natural ecosystems, and popular discontent - is casting a shadow over these countries' future.

There is no shortage of challenges facing the Arab world. Given that many Arab states are modern constructs invented by departing colonial powers, and therefore lack cohesive historical identities, their state structures often lack strong foundations. Add to that external and internal pressures - including from surging Islamism, civil wars, and mass migration from conflict zones - and the future of several Arab countries appears uncertain.

What few seem to recognize is how water scarcity contributes to this cycle of violence. One key trigger of the Arab Spring uprisings - rising food prices - was directly connected to the region's worsening water crisis. Water also fuels tensions between countries. Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for example, are engaged in a silent race to pump the al-Disi aquifer, which they share.

Water can even be wielded as a weapon. In Syria, the Islamic State has seized control of the upstream basins of the two main rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The fact that nearly half of all Arabs depend on freshwater inflows from non-Arab countries, including Turkey and the upstream states on the Nile River, may serve to exacerbate water insecurity further.

Sky-high fertility rates are another source of stress. According to a United Nations report, average annual water availability in the Arab world could fall to 460 cubic meters per capita - less than half the water-poverty threshold of 1,000 cubic meters. In this scenario, water extraction will become even more unsustainable than it already is, with already-limited stores depleted faster than ever - a situation that could fuel further turmoil.

Finally, many countries offer subsidies on water, not to mention gasoline and food, in an effort to "buy" social peace. But such subsidies encourage profligate practices, accelerating water-resource depletion and environmental degradation. In short, the Arab world is increasingly trapped in a vicious cycle. Environmental, demographic, and economic pressures aggravate water scarcity, and the resulting unemployment

and insecurity fuels social unrest, political turmoil, and extremism. Governments respond with increased subsidies on water and other resources, deepening the environmental challenges that exacerbate scarcity and lead to unrest.

Urgent action is needed to break the cycle. For starters, countries should phase out the production of water-intensive crops. Grains, oilseeds, and beef should be imported from water-rich countries, where they can be produced more efficiently and sustainably.

For the crops that Arab countries continue to produce, the introduction of more advanced technologies and best practices from around the world could help to reduce water use. Membrane and distillation technologies can be used to purify degraded or contaminated water, reclaim wastewater, and desalinate brackish or ocean water. Highly efficient drip irrigation can boost the region's fruit and vegetable production, without excessive water use.

Another important step would be to expand and strengthen water infrastructure to address seasonal imbalances in water availability, make distribution more efficient, and harvest rainwater, thereby opening up an additional source of supply. Jordan, with Israeli collaboration and European Union aid, is creating a Red Sea-Dead Sea pipeline, a conduit that would desalinate Red Sea water, in order to provide potable water to Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories, and then funnel the brine to the dying Dead Sea.

Improved water management is also crucial. One way to achieve this is to price water more appropriately, which would create an incentive to prevent wastage and conserve supplies. While subsidies need not be eliminated completely, they should be targeted at smaller-scale farmers or other high-need workers and redesigned so that they, too, provide incentives for water conservation and efficiency.

Of course, wealthier, more stable countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE are better placed than conflict-torn countries like Yemen, Libya, and Iraq to address the rapidly intensifying water crisis they face. But, in order to break the cycle of violence and insecurity, all countries will ultimately have to step up to improve water management and protect ecosystems. Otherwise, their water woes - along with internal unrest - will only worsen. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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