

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

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World Environment Day

On 5th of June, every year, World Environment Day is celebrated throughout the world. This year, as well, it was celebrated in different parts of world under the theme, "Zero Tolerance for Illegal Wild Life Trade". United Nation's Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said in a statement, "On this World Environment Day, I urge people and governments everywhere to overcome indifference, combat greed and act to preserve our natural heritage for the benefit of this and future generations."

It is really important for human beings to be fully aware of the different sorts of dangers that our environment is facing as only through such awareness they can guarantee their survival. Human knowledge and understanding have blessed them with myriads of; however, the inappropriate use of these facilities and their mishandling have brought them some troubles, as well. These troubles or evils have the potential to disturb our environment and introduce disorder within the ecosystem that is necessary for the life to exist on the planet earth. It is really important to note that the possibility of life to exist within the known universe is limited to the planet earth alone. The distance of the earth from the sun, its temperature and other physical conditions exist in such an ordered manner that life is guaranteed here. Moreover, the dependence of living beings on one another, their interactions and their reaction and influence over the environment have certain proportional arrangement, which is termed as eco-system by the scientists. If this eco-system is disturbed in some way or the other, the life is disturbed and the contaminants that are let loose by human beings in the environment has the capacity to disturb it greatly and has the capacity to endanger existence on earth.

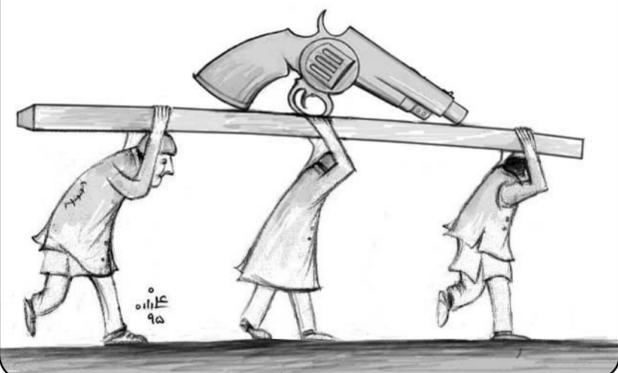
The contaminants basically form pollution, which can influence environment in many different ways. Pollution does not affect the air alone, there are different types of pollution that include; light pollution, littering, noise pollution, soil contamination, thermal pollution, visual pollution, water pollution and some others. Though from the very inception of human beings' civilized life, pollution has been influencing human beings, nonetheless, in today's world of ours, there has been extensive increase in it. With the industrial revolution, the release of pollutants within the natural environment has kept on increasing. Today, we are standing at a stage where many serious minds think that we have to be serious about saving our earth from the menace of pollution. There are some important concerns that most of the environmental scientists believe should be pondered upon extensively. The first one is the degradation of natural environment to the extent that can prove fatal for most of human beings. Already, the pollutants within the environment have been able to introduce different kinds of diseases in the living beings, which, if left unchecked, can go out of control. The other concern is regarding depletion of the Ozone layer and the overall warming up of the globe; this concept is known as "global warming". This concept suggests that with the increase in pollution, there will be considerable rise within the average temperature of the world that may, at maximum, result in the liquefying of the glaciers on the poles and may drown the whole world. Moreover, considerable rise in temperature may disturb the conditions of living on earth and may disrupt the eco-system and jeopardize the existence.

The need of time is to save the earth and life by adopting appropriate policies. Any effort in this regard needs to be two-dimensional. Firstly, every individual must feel his/her responsibility towards the earth and must make sure that he/she does not become a reckless being and must prove helpful for the environment. However, extensive awareness programs in this regard can be really helpful.

Secondly, there have to be efforts on national level as well. The governments in different countries can adopt strict laws regarding the safeguard of the environment and can make sure that different industries and enterprises adopt atmosphere-friendly attitude.

Some of the thinkers suggest that the issues that are raised regarding the depletion of the Ozone layer or global warming are not international issues and they are over-emphasized so that the attentions of the people should be diverted from the basic problems of the society and they become easily governable.

Such views have their importance but taking care of environment must never be neglected. There can be changes in the way the issue is treated but it cannot be neglected altogether. For example, the developed countries of the world can be made more responsible for solving the issue, while the other nations can deal with their basic issues. Moreover, there can be different ways of celebrating the days dedicated to Ozone, earth or environment. One of the ways is to celebrate these days in such a manner so as to highlight the importance of the environment and make the people realize to go against the factors that can harm them.



The Worrisome Rise of Kidnapping Civilians

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

There has been a sharp increase in kidnapping of civilians by Taliban militants in recent weeks. Late last month, militants apparently loyal to the Taliban abducted around 200 passengers traveling from Kabul to northern Badakhshan and Takhar provinces. Most of the passengers were soon released, but the kidnapers have killed around 20 of the abductees. Some of the kidnapped passengers still remain in captivity with their fates being unknown. There are reports of ongoing efforts by Afghan security forces and local influential tribesmen along with government and High Peace Council officials to secure release of the rest of the abductees. The incident came as the worst amid a spate of attacks against civilian vehicles travelling on the insecure highways, underscoring a worsening security situation after the Taliban appointed a new leader last month. Shortly after the kidnapping in Kunduz, 17 passengers were kidnapped in Sar-e Pul province and safely released later.

The sharp increase in the kidnapping of passengers - mainly civilians - traveling through highways indicates an apparent shift in the trend of kidnappings that are carried out by the militant groups in Afghanistan. Government officials accused the Taliban for the kidnapping in Kunduz. The Taliban have not denied having role in the recent incidents, though the group usually rejects being involved in kidnapping civilians. The kidnapping in Kunduz was one of the rare instances of mass abduction of civilian passengers carried out by the Taliban. When announcing start of the group's spring offensive, the Taliban threatened to target Afghan security forces, key government offices and public installations, foreign forces as well as government officials and those serving the administration. Also in the previous years the Taliban used to stop and check vehicles on highways for government employees and members of Afghan security forces.

However, the fact of the kidnapping in Kunduz is perhaps the first of its kind and scale that is committed by the Taliban is quite worrying. The situation is becoming more dangerous for people who are somehow affiliated to government and public agencies like employees, public servants and security forces as well as those working for NGOs. According to local officials and the released passengers the Taliban searched for people having affiliations with the government - members of security forces and government employees. The mass abduction by Taliban is a sign of growing insecurity and further intensification of the situation across the country as the Taliban are attempting to escalate the war against the government after the group named a new leader following the death of its leader Mullah Mansoor.

It could also be a sign of a shifting approach within the Taliban in targeting anyone being linked with public sector and government institutions. The new Taliban leader is said to be a hardliner among the Taliban senior leaders who most likely will try to escalate the ongoing war in Afghanistan. He was responsible for issu-

ing religious fatwas for the Taliban before he came to the leadership of the Taliban. Considering his background, the new Taliban leader is expected to issue or may have already issued fatwas as guidelines for the Taliban field commanders and ground fighters to use more unconventional methods in targeting people serving the Afghan government. This would further result to erosion of the commitment of the parties of the war to safety and protection of the civilian population.

But the tactics the Taliban use in targeting people matter significantly when it comes to the group's war approach as well as its commitment to safety and protection of the civilian population and abiding by war-time regulations. If the Taliban choose to use kidnapping as a mean of war, it would mean that the group is gradually being degraded into a petty criminal group not concerned of public sentiments. In the last year's trend of kidnapping in Zabul and Ghazni provinces targeting mostly Hazara passengers, the Taliban largely avoided of being dragged into feuds and animosity that had roots in inter-ethnic hostilities coming into the surface by emergence of militant groups like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic State who bear anti-Shia sentiments. The Taliban still have been responsible for searching and killing passengers thought of being government employees or members of Afghan security personnel.

But the change of Taliban leadership this year may mean change of war approach and tactics by the group that include focusing on kidnapping civilian vehicles. The Taliban have been responsible for deaths of many civilians kidnapped on suspicion of working for the government or foreigners. Also many civilians are killed by road-side mines planted by the Taliban. Though the Taliban formally maintain that the group is committed to protect civilian, but it has consistently used civilians as human shield and caused danger to civilians by operating in civilian-populated areas. The Taliban leadership has a loose control over the group's field commanders and fighters, which further leaves the ground fighters to commit atrocities against civilians. The Taliban along with other militants are by far committing more atrocities to civilians than any other parties in the war. The United Nations attribute between 70 to 80 percent of civilian deaths to the Taliban and other militant groups.

It is time for the Taliban to be taken accountable for the pains and suffers they cause for civilians in Afghanistan. The Afghan government needs to ask the international community and the United Nations to pressurize the Taliban leadership to end deliberately targeting civilians in Afghanistan. The Taliban must demonstrate that it is committed to war-time regulations particularly to safety of non-combatants and civilians. The government of Afghanistan also needs to take concrete measures to secure the highways across the country where civilian vehicles are frequently stopped and searched by the Taliban and other militant groups.

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The National Unity Government

By Hujjatullah Zia

Wrangling over the election outcome for months, a deal has been signed on September 21, 2014 to form a National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan under which Muhammad Ashraf Ghani became president and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah assumed the office of chief executive officer (CEO) with powers similar to those of prime minister. Meanwhile, the president committed to convening Loya Jirga in two years for a "debate on amending the Constitution and creating a post of executive prime minister," formalizing the CEO role.

Later, the election commission declared Mr. Ghani as winner of the bitterly fought poll. Without declaring the number of votes for each candidate or the turnout figures, Commission Chief Ahmad Yousaf Nuristani was cited as having said, "The Independent Election Commission declares Ashraf Ghani as the president, and thus announces the end of election process."

After the formation of the National Unity Government in a speech to his allies Dr. Abdullah Abdullah stated that the National Unity Government was a significant step in bringing the nation together and minimizing ethnic, linguistic and regional divisions. "Together, we, the government of national unity, will be able to address the problems of the country," Abdullah said. "We've come together, hand in hand, to work toward a better future." He emphasized that the national unity government agreement was signed with the interests of the nation in mind and rejected the accusations of political deals for power.

According to the text of the political agreement, the National Unity Government agreed to the convening of the Loya Jirga and amending the Constitution:

Convening of a Loya Jirga to amend the Constitution and consider the proposal to create the post of executive prime minister. On the basis of Article 2 of the Joint Statement of August 08, 2014 and its attachment, the President is committed to convoking a Loya Jirga for the purpose of debate on amending the Constitution and creating a post of executive prime minister.

After the inauguration ceremony, the president will appoint, in consultation with the CEO by executive order, a commission to draft an amendment to the Constitution.

However, twenty months after the inauguration of the National Unity Government, the timelines for convening Loya Jirga was not met. The electoral reform process has been excruciatingly slow and is set to culminate in a very watered-down version of its original mandate. It is very unlikely that Wolesi Jirga elections will be held this year, with the Independent Election Commission (IEC) in stasis: donors froze most of their funding, the chairperson resigned and the commission is awaiting a renewed selection

process. No preparations have yet been made for district council elections that are supposed to take place for the first time.

On April 2016, the US Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Afghanistan to attend the third meeting of the US-Afghan Bilateral Commission, but his visit was also a show of American support for the NUG. He commended the government for its progress and praised the two leaders for "standing together".

While Kerry's remarks were widely seen as a de facto extension of the National Unity Government's term, the de jure arrangement after the two-year timeframe mentioned in the agreement remains a matter of contention. Some put the legitimacy of NUG under question and believed that the terms of NUG end after two years and it is the Loya Jirga to decide over the issue.

However, the President's Office, when asked for its views, gave the regular assurances that the president was committed to implementing the political agreement and that the parliamentary and district council elections would be held and the Loya Jirga convened, probably with some delays, though.

Constitutionally, the work period of Parliament will terminate after announcing the results of presidential election and parliamentary election will be held one or two months before the expiration of the parliament's period. Currently, although the legal period of parliament has been terminated long ago, there is no preparation for election.

Moreover, it is stated in the constitution as, "The Government shall be comprised of Ministers who work under the chairmanship of the President." With great surprise, two years have passed from presidential election, the cabinet yet to be completed. As a result, the ministry of defense is being controlled by acting head, despite the mounting insurgency and Taliban's heavy offensives. Considering these facts, the unity government is entangled with many challenges and the public believe that clashes about power sharing have compounded the issues. Lack of transparency in election and repeated delay of announcing electoral results by Election Commission was the root of problems.

It is believed that the burgeoning democracy is also moribund since little attention is paid to constitution. As mentioned before, termination of legal period of parliament and no preparation for new election and electoral frauds are in direct conflicts with the law. Therefore, it is a slap in the face of democracy. It is hoped that government will conduct parliamentary election as soon as possible, complete members of cabinet, enforce the law strictly, amend Election Commission and pay due attention to constitution and constitutional law so as to put an end to the challenges going on across the country and catalyze the democratization process.

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