

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

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## Kabul's 'an Eye for an Eye' Policy Will Work out Effective

The Taliban's intensified attacks within the last few days seem to be a backlash against the attacks carried out by the Kabul government. The Taliban militants have sustained heavy casualties following the second round of talks held between the Taliban and Afghan political figures as the Taliban continued their refusal to hold direct talks with Kabul representatives.

Although President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has declared to release some 900 Taliban militants jailed in Afghanistan as a gesture of public goodwill saying that Afghan representatives in Loya Jirga urged his administration to do so, the conflict between warring parties continues unabated. Afghan soldiers have inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban fighters in various provinces. It is likely that the Afghan government seeks to pressure the Taliban through military deal to push them to the negotiating table. Being marginalized in the peace talks, the Kabul government is adopting "an eye for an eye" policy towards the Taliban. I remember vividly that in the last decade, whenever the Taliban fighters had been weakened in the battlefields, they signaled for talks, which would have been a war strategy that could mitigate attacks against them, but never came to the table with genuine intention. The Taliban fear their fighters will be demoralized if attacks against them are intensified. Therefore, they target civilians, including women and children, to pressure the government and boost the morale of their fighters this way. But it is believed that an eye for an eye policy would be the right choice to demoralize their fighters and push them to the table with the Kabul government.

However, releasing the Taliban prisoners jailed in Afghanistan is unlikely to mitigate violence and bloodshed in the country. This policy, during Hamid Karzai administration, was proved abortive as the released prisoners returned to the battleground and resumed their insurgency against the government.

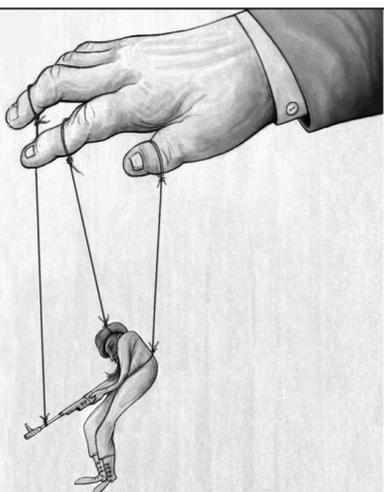
Ghani's one-sided positive response to Loya Jirga - which was boycotted by the Taliban and Afghan opposition leaders - will backfire. On the one hand, the war has been multiplied between the Taliban and the Kabul government, on the other hand, Ghani administration is preparing to release the Taliban militants. Releasing the militant prisoners in a critical situation, as the Taliban are holding out against talks with the Afghan government or declaring truce, will not lead to peace. Thus, it has drawn wide criticism from the public.

Although both the Afghan government and the Taliban believe in military stalemate, the Taliban still continue their insurgency. The first Bonn Conference, held following the downfall of the Taliban's regime without their representatives, for the establishment of interim government is believed to stoke the Taliban's anger. The Taliban, marginalize the Afghan government in the Doha talks, may be seeking a similar meeting to show that their regime had been right and, therefore, re-established. In other words, the Taliban are trying to justify their years of war, carried out under the term of "jihad", through seeking such a meeting. Afghans believe that the peace stalemate would be brokered if the Taliban held talks with the Afghan representatives, tribal elders, and influential individuals. For instance, Loya Jirga could provide a platform for the Taliban to have their say directly with Afghan nation. They could clearly speak their mind and list their demands in the Loya Jirga and vowed to remain committed. But the Taliban stood against the Loya Jirga, which showed their lukewarm response to peace and stability.

The Taliban have constantly turned a deaf ear to the demands of Afghan nation. They turned down the public demands for talks and ceasefire. They have also constantly refused the demand of peace marchers, who are urging warring parties to stop war.

The Taliban must not make the peace process too complicated. They have to act wisely and stop the conflict since it will only lead to casualties and destruction. Why should a party continue war if it only results in horrible consequences and has no winner? As the Taliban are aware that Afghans are highly frustrated with their acts of violence and terror, they should no more continue their insurgency.

The Taliban have to use the current opportunity for supporting peace to avoid the public rage and do not miss this chance. It is clear that if they continue the war for one decade more, they will not win. Hence, they had better stop the conflict and be integrated into the government's body. The government has no chance other than continuing an eye for an eye policy unless the Taliban signal for talks and ceasefire.



## Urgent Need for Population Control in Afghanistan

By: M. Rasa

Population is the basic part of a state. States are formed for the welfare and wellbeing of their people; without population no state or society can exist. There are many states in the world and all of them have different number of people living in them. There is not a fixed rule about the number of people living in a state. It depends on the size and conditions of the territories. In the modern concept of state the size of population has to be analyzed as per the resources of the state, as the larger population does not always suggest prosperity. There are countries that have been suffering because of their large population and limited resources.

Afghanistan is one of the same kinds of countries that suffer from economic and political problems. There has been intense poverty in most parts of country because of continuous wars and natural calamities. The political and economic infrastructures are in the early stages of their development. In such a scenario Afghanistan is having a considerable population. The number of people living in Afghanistan at the moment is more around 31.5 million, which is just a rough estimate.

This estimate is based on an earlier census that was incomplete, and does not represent Afghan population accurately. The actual number may be more than the one mentioned above. It has been one of the greatest misfortunes of the country that there has not been any comprehensive scientific population census in the country, which is really necessary for better political, social and economic decision making. It is really difficult to administer a population without knowing its composition correctly.

Unfortunately the population growth rate in Afghanistan has been high as well. Population growth rate is the estimate of the increase in population per year. The rate for Afghanistan, according to the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) is 2.4 percent. If the same rate retains the population in the country will

be doubled within three decades. Currently if it is accepted that the population of Afghanistan is around 28 million, in 2025 it may reach to more than 34 million. This clearly indicates the serious nature of the growth taking place in the country. Definitely, this growth rate is going to test the capabilities of Afghan resources and Afghan government in the times to come.

Among the reasons of the rapid growth in population the most dominant one is that the people are not aware of the issue at all. The people living the remote areas of the country do not know even their basic rights and responsibilities. It is really difficult to expect from them to have proper understanding of the issue. It is really unfortunate to note that even the well-educated people in the urban areas do not consider this issue seriously. One of the greatest troubles with the Afghan society is that it has been vehemently dominated by strict tribal norms and values and fundamentalist interpretation of religion.

Furthermore, the rise in health facilities has been able to control the mortality rate to a certain extent, which would ultimately have affect on the growth rate. Apart from that there are financial barriers that restrict the families to go for a luxury, like birth control.

Population growth rate in our country has been unchecked and can really lead to numerous problems. The government in this regard has to take serious and practical steps to control the issue as soon as possible. There should be intensive awareness programs for the people as a whole. Such programs should rather be started from the college and university level, wherein the citizens must be given complete understanding of threats that can be faced because of unchecked population growth. As far as the remote areas are considered, the endeavors must be doubled as in such areas it is not just about communicating the message to the families; rather the endeavors must go through strict and narrow-minded tribal norms and religious teachings.

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## Lessons from India in Digital Disruption

By: Nandan Nilekani

Digital technology can rapidly transform how countries provide services such as education and health to their citizens. The public services of the future should be effective, efficient, fair, data-driven, and responsive to individual needs. And the groundwork to turn this vision into reality needs to be laid now.

Managed wisely, data can be the key to providing quality health and education services for all - at speed, at scale, and in a sustainable way - and to boosting social and economic inclusion. Alongside these exciting opportunities, countries must also anticipate and manage the associated risks of the digital revolution. To this end, India's pioneering use of data and technology offers four lessons for other developing countries.

First, scale should be built into project design from the very beginning, instead of being an afterthought. In India, we must think about how we can help one million community health workers provide health care to rural areas, and how we improve the skills of 100 million young people seeking better jobs. The world must ask a similar question: How can we provide safe, high-quality vaccinations to 20 million infants around the world, and educate the more than 260 million children and youth who are not in school?

Second, countries must focus on building the underlying digital infrastructure needed for sustained success, and avoid the allure of the latest shiny innovations. Too often, developing countries have seized on new technologies - "Distribute tablets to schoolchildren!" - without giving enough thought to how they will be used in specific national contexts. This has resulted in many disappointing pilot projects that failed to deliver sustainable impact at scale.

A new report from the Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive Development, based at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, suggests how countries can address this problem. The report urges them to establish a foundation of "digital building blocks" - including basic infrastructure and skills - in order to harness positive disruptions to education and health services. In addition, countries should provide essential "digital scaffolding" around which new technological solutions can be deployed at scale.

India has led the way in this regard, by intentionally making its new digital infrastructure a public good. For example, Aadhaar, India's biometric unique identification system, shows how cutting-edge technology can solve the societal problem of establishing unique identities in a developing country of over a billion people. Having been adopted by more than 1.2 billion citizens, Aadhaar has now become a platform for social innovation, fostering many new solutions to diverse problems and serving as the foundational ID for multiple initiatives in different sectors across India.

For example, the use of Aadhaar helps to prevent the abuse of various government schemes, ensuring that, say, the cooking

gas subsidy is extended to each citizen only once in a given period. Aadhaar is also used by all citizens as proof of identity in key processes such as applying for and renewing passports, opening bank accounts, and accessing credit quickly and conveniently.

Likewise, EkStep, a not-for-profit initiative that I co-founded with Rohini Nilekani and Shankar Maruwada, has built a learner-centric, technology-based societal platform to improve literacy and numeracy for 200 million children across India. To make an impact at scale, EkStep connects various innovations isolated in siloes and engages the key actors across the education ecosystem (public, private, or social) through collaboration and co-creation networks. This open and free digital infrastructure is enabling a range of solutions, including in-class resources, learning and training content, assessment aids, a registry of teachers, rewards and recognition, and learning communities.

Third, countries must anticipate and effectively manage risks that arise from collecting and using digital data. As an initial step, the Indian government has developed an electronic consent framework that enables citizens to understand and authorize specific uses of their data.

But, in addition to consent, we also need new data-handling institutions that do not have interests competing with those of the user. The Reserve Bank of India's well-designed digital account aggregator system, for example, enables potential lenders to review borrowers' financial assets digitally, on the basis of borrowers' explicit consent to access only specific data, for a specific purpose, for a specified period of time. To enable large-scale financial inclusion, key government, private-sector, and civil-society actors must quickly establish standards, regulations, and institutions that put citizens back in control of their own data.

Finally, a gradual evolutionary approach will not resolve large, complex societal problems. Too often, organizations believe they have the solution to a big social challenge - such as improving access to health care across rural India - and simply need to keep chipping away at the problem. Rather than searching for one perfect solution, countries should instead build a digital infrastructure that empowers passionate innovators, nurturing an interconnected network that can simultaneously co-create thousands of solutions to hundreds of different problems. Instead of more and better siloes, we need more nimble and open innovation environments.

New technology, institutions, and regulations can help countries to reimagine education and health, build human capital, and prepare their young people for the jobs of tomorrow. To be sure, India still has much to do in that regard. But its success so far will, one hopes, inspire other developing countries to nurture equally bold and inclusive digital ambitions.

Nandan Nilekani is Chairman of the EkStep Foundation and Chairman of Infosys Ltd., and was founding Chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (Aadhaar).

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