

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



June 23, 2015

Parliament Attacked

Monday June 22, 2015 turned to be another unfortunate day for Afghan representatives and masses alike – a loud bang of explosion jolted Kabul city followed by hours of gunfire. The tragic incident took place at about 10.20 AM in the busy morning – the parliament had to undertake a significant session of introducing the nominee for ministry of defense. Reportedly, the suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden car outside parliament aided by additional attackers trying to force their way in to the Parliament compound through the southern gate whilst firing upon security staff who successfully managed to hold them off until security forces arrived. The siege lasted just over an hour before Special Forces killed all seven insurgents. The bang followed widespread panic coincided the moment when the second vice president, Mohammad Sarwar Danish, was due to introduce the minister of defense nominee to MPs for a vote of confidence. The parliamentarians and journalist rushed to escape any possible gun fire in pursuit of save heaven within the parliament.

Reportedly, within half an hour at least nine explosions were heard along with sporadic gunfire. It is said that the suicide bomber detonated his explosives in busy Darul Aman road, near the gates of Parliament - causing considerable damage to other cars in the area and to nearby buildings. According to military officials seven attackers were involved in the Parliament siege on parliament in Kabul all of whom were gunned down by special force. The security forces certainly did commendable task in restraining the militants so that they could not inflict greater harms to parliamentarian and ordinary masses. Seemingly, the secret agencies couldn't respond aptly – consequently the militant's unleashed horrific day in Kabul. The responsible department should be put to question for this intelligence failure.

Undoubtedly, it was a monster attack that was duly foiled by security forces. According to initial report, five civilians dead with inclusion to insurgents so far have been reported – however over dozens of passersby sustained serious injuries and wounds. Health officials have confirmed at least 31 civilians injured – including five women and three children in the attack. Putting the down the sanctity of holy month of Ramadan reflects Taliban's ignorance about Islam and Islamic teachings – it is only so they vowed to continue the bloodletting of innocent Afghans.

Following the tragic incident the Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, in his Twitter claimed responsibility for the attack. Earlier, Taliban had turned down the request put forth by Afghan Ulema Council to disband militancy in the honor of Sacred Month of Ramadan. The attack depicts Taliban are exercising a great deal of viciousness, to have their say implemented in the possible peace talks. Certainly, Taliban aspires to partake in peace talks in the position of strength.

Subsequent to horrific attack the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strongly condemned a coordinated attack by Taliban on Afghan Parliament. Pakistan and India did not lag behind condemning the terror act – aptly issued a statement shortly after the siege ended. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has condemned the attack on Parliament, saying the targeting of civilians during the month of Ramadan is un-Islamic and that those responsible are simply criminals. India's Congress President Sonia Gandhi condemned the terror attack, calling it a "heinous attempt by fundamentalists to subvert democratic forces". May all the countries exercised their influence to get Taliban convinced for ceasefire – a condition for commencement of peace talk!

Similar incidence has turned the matter of daily account. In order to unearth the grave situation of law and order, the UN's former report is an eye opener for the government and its security institutions. The report discloses 1,000 civilians being killed in the Afghan conflict in the first four months of the year, while 1,989 were injured. It is not only the civilians who are preyed the aid workers are not spared either in the ongoing conflict. The UN chronicles serious reservations against ruthless killing of civilians in general and aid worker in particular.

The report attributes most of the casualties to Taliban who is said to be engaged in large-scale attacks and bombings across the country as part of their summer offensive. The report mentions southern Kandahar province the most insecure with greatest life claiming incidents. The report continued that a total of 4,672 insurgents and 331 soldiers were killed during the month, a sharp spike in the causality toll as compared to the past few months. The report read a total of 60 bombings and IED explosions have occurred in the recent month. In addition, the report also attributed 47 incidents of abductions and other violence to insurgents. 124 people were reportedly abducted by insurgents during the month. The report depicts cowardice of insurgents who hold innocent civilians prey to head to their evil designs.

Undeniably there is no solution to decade long conflict devoid of political solution – certainly peace talk is elementary to install peace, given all the warring factions conciliate on agreeable points. After all it is the responsibility of a government and concerned departments within a state to ensure peace and security of its citizens. However, the governments that suffer from administrative incapacities fail to guarantee security must try to turn around and should give up – in the bid to prevent the weaker strata of the society; women, ethnic and religious minorities and the common people suffer.



Ramadan – Month of Peace and Compassion

By Hujjatullah Zia

US President Barack Obama and other American leaders have felicitated Muslims on the beginning of Ramadan, pledging to work with them for promoting peace and stability. President Obama said that Ramadan was a time to "reinforce faith, compassion and forgiveness, and perseverance through adversity." He noted that in this month of giving, Muslims around the globe reach out to assist those afflicted by conflict, hunger, poverty and disease. "In the United States, American Muslims join their fellow citizens to serve the less fortunate, hosting inter-faith activities that build understanding and remind us that we stand together as one American family," he continued.

There is no doubt that the propitious month of Ramadan is a spiritual therapy for Muslims to strengthen their faiths and moral values. One has to nurture his/her virtue and human practices and curtail their megalomania and cupidity. In other words, the individuals should break the chains of Satanism and free their souls from the yoke of worldly pleasures.

US Secretary of State John Kerry affirmed that one of the core elements of the US diplomacy was "our desire to communicate clearly with others in support of the fundamental rights and dignity of every human being".

He said Ramadan was also a time to reflect on awareness of the responsibility of people of all faiths to help those in need, including those stricken by poverty and the victims of conflict in such countries as Burma, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen.

In Ramadan, men's "rights and dignity" have to be protected and the ideologue militants also must eschew from spilling the human's blood. Violence and bloodshed are the most abominable acts – especially in the month of Ramadan.

Ill-fatedly, the militants violate men's natural rights to life and liberty without an iota of mercy. The Taliban and Daesh remain the epitome of cruelty and inhumanity as ever before through killing people in the worst possible way. Besides slaying the individuals, the Taliban militants collect Zakat (charity fund) in restive parts of the country by coercion and threat – reports say. Of late, Afghan government urged the militants to cease insurgency in the holy month of Ramadan and let the public practice their religious rituals. But the militants turned down this request. In response to the Taliban's rejection of a ceasefire request, President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said, "They don't have any way to escape the prayers of upset mothers and orphans, and they cannot get rid of the anger of our devoted and patriotic soldiers who are ever ready for tackling insurgents." Mr. Ghani further said that war has been imposed on Afghanistan and its continuation will increase poverty in the country.

Afghans are highly exhausted from this endless insurgency which was inflicted upon them and led to heavy casualties. They pray for peace and wish to breathe safely in a serene atmosphere. The newspapers' tragic headlines and gory pictures of the killed and wounded individuals on televisions are really traumatic for the public. To their unmitigated chagrin, there seems no panacea for their bleeding hearts. Neither the counterterrorism campaign nor a democratic state could remedy their problems.

The world knows that both the ideologue and mercenary insurgents, whether in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Nigeria, lack humanity and moral norms and never answer to the call of their conscience positively. Their insatiable thirst for violence and carnage and physical pleasures, such as Jihad-e Nikah enunciated by IS militants in Syria, has outweighed their humanity. Therefore, I believe that the Taliban militants will never agree to the message of peace issued by the Afghan government.

The oozing blood of innocent individuals spilt by the militants in the aforementioned countries by religious radicals and stigmatizing the reputation of modest females and transgressing their inalienable and inviolable rights and dignity have caused Islam-phobia in many western countries. In another term, the extremists have imposed their own ideology on religion and tailored the religious convictions in the narrow frame of their mindset and now introduce this self-made worldview as religious beliefs. Their toxic ideology is highly detrimental not only to the Middle east but to the world. In such a case, the message of peace will be futile and misunderstanding widens. In short, since the militants' beliefs are based on wrong ideology – which lacks true knowledge and religious tolerance – they will not be humanized in this holy month of Ramadan. As a result, currently the Taliban's attacks continue unabated in restive parts of the country and their mala fide intentions have not been extenuated at all. It is really a state of sorry to see that the holy month of Ramadan has been politicized negatively.

Ramadan is considered to be the month of compassion and devotion. People are supposed to inject new life to their faith and be humanized through communing with Almighty Allah in the heart of nights and refrain not only from eating and drinking but from all evils and misdeeds. The afflicted individuals and have-not neighbors must be supported and sympathized and all the rights and dignity must be protected. We have to fight against the inner and outer lusts and temptations so as to polish our souls. After all, practicing moral values for a month should last for the whole year and we have to embed bona fide humanity in our mind and spirit.

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South Asia Should Prepare Now for the Next Disaster

By Annette Dixon

About 9,000 lives have been lost to the devastating earthquake in Nepal on April 25 and the powerful aftershock on May 12. A conference in Kathmandu on June 25 will bring Nepal together with its international partners to build the country back better and safer.

Unfortunately, this is not just a Nepal challenge. From Afghanistan to Bangladesh, much of South Asia is located in one of the highest seismically active regions in the world. More than 600 million people live along the fault-line across the Himalayan belt that runs through Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan.

The earthquake threat in South Asia is generated by the collision between three tectonic plates. The Indian plate is moving northward at a speed of about five centimeters a year. In doing so, it collides with the Eurasian Plate. Due to this collision, the Himalayan Mountains are forced upwards and a large number of earthquakes are generated. This has been happening for millions of years.

Over the past 100 years, the region has seen some major earthquakes – 1934 Bihar-Nepal, 1945 Makran, 1950 Assam, 1993 Latur, 2001 Bhuj, 2005 Pakistan, 2015 Nepal. Just looking at the big magnitude earthquakes, however, can obscure the real picture. South Asia is constantly beset by tremors. The World Bank recently analyzed earthquake events over a one-year period from May 2013 to May 2014 that impacted the South Asia region. Only considered were those earthquakes recorded by the United States Geological Survey's global earthquake monitoring database (USGS) greater than 4.0 magnitude on the Richter scale. The tally totaled 1,247 recorded earthquake events.

South Asia may have had earthquakes for millions of years. But the difference today is that more and more people are living in the earthquake zone, often crowded into rapidly growing cities. Much of this booming urbanization in high risk seismic zones includes everything from mega-cities, to secondary and tertiary cities, to towns.

No one can predict when or where the next earthquake will happen. But what we do know is that there are many measures countries can take to protect their citizens against the next natural disaster. The next big earthquake need not become the South Asian mega-disaster of the 21st century.

Among the measures countries can take are building resilient housing, improving building codes, and strengthening critical infrastructure including schools, hospitals, bridges, dams, key road infrastructure, public buildings and so on. Strengthening disaster response mechanisms and providing better search and rescue equipment and training to first responders is critical. This also includes having contingency planning and systems set up to hand out food to the vulnerable and offer vaccinations to halt diseases that inevitably spread after a disaster hits.

I specifically want to highlight the importance of strengthening schools. The Nepal earthquake rendered unusable (fully and partly damaged) more than 30,000 classrooms across 9,100 schools. The earthquake struck on a Saturday when schools were closed. Had it struck on a weekday, the lives lost and the devastation could have been far worse. Making schools safe for our children should become a priority across the region.

These things sound like they cost a lot of money. But not doing them can cost even more. This cost goes beyond the tragic loss of lives.

The World Bank estimates that every dollar invested in disaster prevention saves \$4 in disaster damage. A single large disaster can cost between three to six percent of a developing country's economic output. This can wipe out years of development progress that a country has worked hard to achieve. In Nepal, it was the poor that suffered the most from the earthquake.

Now is the time to invest in disaster resilience. This should be done across all sectors including transport, energy, agriculture, education, health, gender, housing and livelihoods. South Asia should prepare for the next disaster now.

The author is Vice President for the South Asia Region of the World Bank.

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