

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



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Standards in our Society

A society is known by the standards it maintains in different walks of life. Better societies tend to have higher standards for almost every aspect of life; however, it is debatable what high standards mean. The standards that are as per the socio-political circumstances are mostly considered acceptable and are, therefore, thought to be perfect. Nonetheless, relevance to the context does not always mean that the standards are perfect and positive. For example, in today's modern society, being modern is one of the required standards but it is not always thought to be positive.

It is really difficult to set universal standards for the societies of the worlds as cultures and social settings differ. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the standards that show the true position of human beings; their true role and behavior - the one that keep in consideration the well-being of others, the love and affection for the fellow beings, true inspiration for science, arts and creativity are basically the ones that must be encouraged and safeguarded.

Today's human beings seem to have lost their way. They have turned too much materialistic and saunter astray in their spiritual life. They fail to discover the true purpose of their existence and are conditioned into something that they are not by the systems and setups. They are in a position where they are becoming the cause of their own notoriety and destruction. They love wealth, pleasure and affluence and they are ready to pay any price for it.

Herman Hesse rightly observes, "Whoever wants music instead of noise, joy instead of pleasure, soul instead of gold, creative work instead of business, passion instead of foolery, finds no home in this trivial world of ours." This has, thus, given rise to a man who perfectly fits in today's materialistic societies but may fail to fulfill the requirements of being a true human.

It is important to note what the standards are in our society. Our society is vehemently noticeable because of its self-centeredness and vanity. Unfairness and discrimination are the usual behavioral trends. If a person, for his own happiness, offers another person anguish; if a person cuckolds another person or if a group of people violates the right of other groups, it is not odd as it is normal exercise within our society.

Since the socio-political settings and the objective conditions have cemented the way for such types of deeds and approaches, imagining something different would be irrational and even silly.

As the rule of the race is to thrust others back and attempt to win the race in any thinkable way, not pursuing it would mean trailing in the race, which nobody is prepared to admit as everyone wants to triumph. Keeping today's society in mind, it can be claimed that a person who is not crafty and self-seeking is principally unwise. Alternatively, the crafty evils cannot be censured, too.

As a matter of fact, in our society, when a person does an evil act, he is not all the time guilty for it. Suppose a person, on a cold and snowy night, trembling with cold crosses your house and you sense pity and do him a service by giving him warm housing and a blanket to keep himself warm, then you ought to be totally prepared for this that while departing your house he would take your blanket and some other things along with it.

It is because of the reason that the blanket has sheltered him from the cold weather and now he worries about the cold weather that he would face while going out. He can also request for it and you, with an open-handedness, can give that blanket along with some other things to him, but that would be a courtesy and our people even don't have the ability to take the courtesy.

In this society, if a killer is not a relative to the prey, it is really odd. Attachment, adoration, belief, uprightness and devoutness are the values that are only important to few of the people; else, these are only words which the people of our society use so as to conceal the crimes of their conscience and the evils of their intents. We are mainly bounded by lies and false exhibition and if we are able to defend our truth, it would be a great accomplishment.

Nevertheless, the company and ownership of truth is truly wearisome. It involves bearing seclusion and accepting the responsibility of being dissimilar. Yet, it is not something to be discouraged about. A human can be disenchanted from another human but should not be disenchanted from humanity, because human beings live for a definite period of time but humanity has always lived and will live persistently. The significant point is to deliberate why the kind of society, wherein a person has to lead another person by going over his cadaver, should not change. Why shouldn't we modify the system wherein human beings do not need the sustenance and collaboration of others for the improvement of society in its entirety, but need for their selfish benefits? There is something utterly wrong with the society that does not have love and brotherhood as its standards but inspires the people to have negative rivalry so as to own as much material coziness as possible. The society we reside in is in desperate need of true humanity, true affection and true warmth.



Terrorism Leads to Growing Rift

By Hujjatullah Zia

The recent spike in militancy has triggered a sense of mistrust between Afghan-Pak officials. Following the attack in Lahore and Sehwan, Islamabad claimed that the militants held sanctuaries in Afghanistan's soil, and it violated the country's territorial integrity through firing rocket in Nangarhar province which sparked off a sense of anger among the public. The bonhomie between the two countries melted away and harsh rhetoric between the officials ensued.

On March 8, the militants targeted Daud Khan's Hospital in Kabul, which left heavy casualties behind.

For both the Kabul and Sindh's attack, the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility. This suggested the fact that the Afghan-Pak nations are left at the mercy of "common enemy" and their blood is spilled indiscriminately.

Moreover, ISIL group showed that it was strong enough to carry out deadly attacks in the heart of cities.

The attacks on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's Shrine and Daud Khan's Hospital revealed the dangerous ideology of the ISIL fighters - although it is no more a mystery for the world - which pays no heed to humanity and humanitarian law via targeting shrines and hospitals which are to be respected. In other words, attacking shrines and hospitals are curse both from the religious and moral perspectives, if not considering the international law.

In addition to this fact, the ISIL's loyalists play instrumental role in widening the gap between Kabul and Islamabad. With the current tension and border's closure, the ISIL fighters will gain stronger confidence and engage in militancy to view the action and reaction between the two neighboring countries. Since the ISIL fighters are mostly mercenaries rather than ideologues, they will use their destructive role as a strategy to cause a rift not only between countries but also nations and ethnic groups.

As a result, the ethnic minority groups were targeted and killed systematically both in Afghanistan and Pakistan with the emergence of the ISIL group. Unknown gunmen were stopping the buses and killing ethnic groups on the grounds of their race, color and faith, including women and children, so as to engender a sense of hatred among ethnic groups. This strategy of warring parties has created a gap between Kabul and Islamabad governments, which were supposed to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

The mutual relations have been fluctuated between bad and worse. Following the recent meeting between Pakistani PM's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Afghan National Security Adviser (NSA) Haneef Atmar, in London, the relations seem to thaw. In a message posted on his Facebook page after Wednesday's talks, Dr Omar Zakhilwal - the Afghan ambassador to Islamabad - said

the London meeting was held "to discuss and agree on a mechanism for genuine bilateral cooperation on fighting terrorism, agree on steps and measures to improve the current tense bilateral relations and mutual trust". He further wrote, "We are positive that the implementation of the mechanism we agreed upon can inject the needed trust and confidence for constructive forward-looking state-to-state relations and cooperation."

The dialogue in London was focused on mutual concerns about existence of terrorist sanctuaries on each other's soil. Soon after the bombing of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's shrine, the Pakistan Army had handed over a list of wanted 76 TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) terror suspects allegedly residing in hideouts along the Pakistan-Afghan border to Kabul. Subsequently, Afghanistan sent a list of 85 Taliban and Haqqani network 'commanders', living in Pakistan and linked any action against TTP and JuA terrorists to "verifiable action" by Pakistan.

It goes without saying that emotional decision regarding political issues will be naïve of a country. Warring parties pose enough threats to the region and the countries will have to adopt effective strategies to tackle the issue rather than exchanging harsh rhetoric or resorting to arms against one another's territories. In addition to being vulnerable to terrorism, it is believed that political tensions will put pressure on nations.

After all, it will compound the challenges. Secondly, terrorist networks have inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan and Pakistani nations and scores of soldiers paid sacrifices in combating terrorism. In another item, terrorism has been changed into a highly serious political issue in our era to put pressure on governments and militant fighters even lead proxy wars in some countries.

Shooting the militant fighters on the head will not mitigate the insurgency but all factors and grounds for fundamentalism must be destroyed so as to stop giving birth to radical mentalities. The questions are that where do the militant fighters come from? What are their financial sources? Where are they trained and how are they radicalized? Why do the teenagers show tendency towards the cruel practices and intolerant attitude of terrorist networks?

Hence, the reasons behind radicalism and supporting factors must be scrutinized. It is highly crucial to come to the roots of the issue and eliminate the supporting factors. Since the entire region is susceptible to the venom spewed forth by terrorist elements, all countries are to play their parts with bona fide intension.

So, the blame game will be in favor of the fighters, who seek to fish in the troubled waters, and will not tackle the issue. It is hoped that the countries join forces to combat terrorism so as to stop it from further destruction.

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Where Has All the Water Gone?

By Yasmin Siddiqi

We live on a parched planet. Farmers till arid pastureland, and policymakers fret over empty reservoirs, dry rivers, and thirsty cities. And that only scratches the surface - literally - of the world's water problem. Subterranean aquifers, which amount to the world's reserve water tank, are also running dry. If this continues, the consequences could be dire, especially for water-stressed and fast-growing Asia.

Subterranean aquifers are repositories of water located deep underground, in permeable rock, soil, or sand.

And they contain about 100 times the amount of water found on the earth's surface, in streams, lakes, rivers, and wetlands. If you're in central Africa, South America, or some parts of Europe, you're probably standing just a few hundred feet above one.

Surface water resources, such as desalinated seawater or recycled wastewater, will not close the global gap - predicted to reach 40% by 2030 - between water supply and demand. So subterranean aquifers are increasingly being exploited for agriculture, power generation, and daily use in fast-growing cities (urban Asia is growing at a rate of 120,000 people per day).

Today, about 30% of the world's liquid freshwater comes from subterranean aquifers. And one-third of the 37 largest aquifers studied by the University of California between 2003 and 2013 were severely depleted, receiving little or no replenishment from rainfall. Some of the most stressed aquifers are in the driest regions, including Asia, up to 88% of which is water-stressed.

Asia contains around one-third of the world's land irrigated by groundwater, with India, China, and Pakistan being the biggest consumers. South Asia alone accounts for half the groundwater used globally. But Asia's aquifers - many of which were formed millennia ago, when areas like northern China had a more humid climate - are no longer being replenished regularly by rainfall.

Instead, boreholes are getting deeper and water tables are falling. In Pakistan's Punjab Province, over-pumping is lowering the water table by up to a half-meter (20 inches) per year, threatening future food and water security and making thirsty crops like sugarcane and rice tougher to grow.

Asia's surging population - which could jump by 25%, topping five billion, by 2050 - will put even more stress on food, energy, and water supplies. Globally, 60% more food will be needed by then, with agriculture soaking up increasingly scarce freshwater. Climate change will exacerbate conditions further.

But the problem extends beyond water depletion. Over-pumping of groundwater is already leading to soil subsidence, causing some Asian cities to sink. By 2030, as much as 80% of North Jakarta could be below sea level. Parts of

Beijing are sinking by several centimeters per year, according to some estimates.

Moreover, depleted aquifers near coastlines are prone to contamination from saltwater, rendering land barren. Some aquifers are contaminated by arsenic, which can occur naturally deep underground. Nature Geoscience estimates that more than 60% of groundwater in the Indo-Gangetic aquifer is contaminated by arsenic or salt. In Bangladesh, water tainted by arsenic is blamed for more than 40,000 deaths each year.

The first step toward remedying this situation is to establish precisely how much groundwater is left and how it is being used - not easy, but not impossible either. NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment satellite provides information on changes in the earth's gravity due to fluctuating water volumes. And by applying remote sensing technology to river basins, we can determine how much surface water is available and who is consuming what.

Another important step is to improve the pricing of groundwater. China has run a pilot program in which farmers had to pay extra if they pumped more than their allocation. Similar approaches have worked well in Australia and Mexico. But such measures can be politically difficult to implement. The key to success will be to help countries not only to design the right policies, but also to create the legal frameworks needed to establish and enforce them.

Even more politically difficult would be the elimination of electricity and gas subsidies, which encourage farmers to pump groundwater all day. If such subsidies can't be withdrawn, there are innovative alternatives that could curb over-pumping.

For example, in Gujarat, India, the government has reduced groundwater pumping by offering power for just eight hours per day. Farmers have the power they need, but can't pump all day long. Another approach could be to buy back surplus power from farmers to feed into the grid. That would not just reduce over-pumping, but also help to supplement rural incomes. Efforts to replenish aquifers could also be pursued. A pilot program in India's Uttar Pradesh state collects excess floodwater in storage ponds, from which water seeps into the water table.

The final step would be to improve management of surface water, thereby reducing the temptation to turn to groundwater in the first place. Around 80% of wastewater is returned untreated to rivers, often contaminating them. Taking stronger action to stop this would be far simpler - including logistically and politically - than conserving groundwater. Subterranean aquifers should be the reservoir of last resort. If we don't protect them today, future generations will pay a steep - or even an existential - price. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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