

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



May 04, 2016

World Press Freedom Day

May 03, is celebrated as the World Press Freedom Day in different countries of the world. The day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993 after the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference. The day is celebrated to highlight the fundamental of press freedom; analyze the state of press freedom around the world; defend the media from attacks on their independence; and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty. This year the theme of the day was, "Access to information and fundamental freedoms - this is your right!" This implies that there should be freedom of information as a fundamental human right and efforts should be made to protect freedom of press from censorship and surveillance overreach. It also urges for ensuring the safety for journalism online and offline. And this demand is not just a vague demand. It is based on the international law. Journalists, according to the Declaration of Rights and Duties of the Journalists, must have free access to all information sources, and the right to freely inquire on all events conditioning public life. Therefore, secret of public or private affairs may be opposed only to journalists in exceptional cases and for clearly expressed motives. And, any factor hindering the journalists from having access to all information sources must be considered illegal and should be eliminated. Moreover, the journalist have the right to refuse subordination to anything contrary to the general policy of the information organ to which he collaborates such as it has been laid down by writing and incorporated in his contract of employment, as well as any subordination not clearly implicated by this general policy. And, the journalists cannot be compelled to perform a professional act or to express an opinion contrary to his convictions or his conscience.

The claim of the rights of the press or journalists is not only advantageous for them but for the entire society. If press and journalists are free to do their job they can support in identifying the facts and figures within the society, which will portray a complete picture and also assist in finding out the deficiencies. Unless, people have the true picture of the socio-political conditions, it is very difficult to have awareness and be able to play a positive role within the society.

There is a sort of ill-intention behind imposing hindrances in the way of press freedom. There are certain factions within the society that do not intend that the people should know about their activities and their intentions; therefore, they make efforts to ban or hinder the media. By doing so they make sure that their evil deeds remain concealed and do not receive attention.

Sometimes, the governments, themselves, suggest or impose ban or restrictions on media. It is because of the fact that they do not like criticism on what they do. They fear that if press and media disclose their activities or the shortcomings in their policies and practices, the public opinion may turn against them and they may lose popular will or even legitimacy.

On some other occasions, certain strata in society, having the support of the government or the certain administrative units pressurize the press so that they do not go against their wills. They may have certain intentions or objectives that are only for their own personal benefits or may even involve illegal practice or the violation of the constitution; therefore, they through the government machinery impose bans and restrictions on the press so that their motives are not disclosed.

Ill-fatedly, Afghanistan is also one of the countries that have not been giving enough heed to the freedom of the press and the rights of the journalists. The war and conflicts and the negligence of the relevant authorities have resulted in poor development in media sector and particularly in press. Moreover, different sorts of discrimination against the journalists have continued in different parts of the country. Afghan government, different organizations and groups both national and international must make sure that they strive to make efforts in bringing about real changes for the development of press in the country and must protect the rights of the journalists as they are not a party to the conflict and do not serve anyone's purpose.

Provided that the rights of the journalists are protected, it is important that the journalists must fulfill their responsibilities in the best possible manner. They are required to respect truth whatever be the consequence to themselves, because of the right of the public to know the truth; defend freedom of information, comment and criticism; and report only on facts of which they know the origin of; not to suppress essential information nor alter texts and documents and not to use unfair methods to obtain news, photographs or documents.



The Deteriorating Environment for Free Press

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the Taliban and other militant groups increasingly targeting media members in Afghanistan, the environment for operation of media outlets has become more dangerous. Reporters find it increasingly difficult to work and report the facts on the developments in the country as they fear from being targeted by the militant groups that have heightened their offensive across the country. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the recent years have been the deadliest for the Afghan journalists who have been targeted not only by the militant groups but also by local warlords and their militia groups who have considerable influence across the country. The increase in fatalities of journalists in Afghanistan is indicating that the freedom of expression has become further restricted in Afghanistan and the prospect for the free press remains even gloomier than the past.

The conditions for operation of mass media in Afghanistan has deteriorated while Afghanistan is obliged to honor freedom of press and has committed to improve the environment for mass media in the country. The intensification of Taliban insurgency and the government's campaign to contain the militant groups is the main factor behind all other factors that have led to the worsening environment for operation of media channels. The heightened war efforts by both sides have led to both parties ignoring their commitments to protect the media members and reporters reporting on the developments in the country. The threats against reporters are not coming only from the Taliban and other militant groups but also from powerful local officials and pro-government militia groups in the provinces.

The dismal fact about providing protection for the media members is that the government's commitment has also diminished in the face of the Taliban insurgency and other numerous challenges existing in the country. In recent years, many reporters and media members have been targeted by local government officials and pro-government warlords who control private militias in some provinces across the country. However, the government has failed to prevent deterioration of the situation and pursue the culprits and influentials behind the incidents happened to the reporters. According to NAI, the media advocacy group that support freedom of press in Afghanistan, both pro-government groups and the militants continue to threaten the media members as attacks against media members and reporters have been steadily on the rise.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that the biggest threat against freedom of expression and operation of mass media is coming from the militant groups. Employees of some major media channels are now considered as enemies and legitimate military target by the militant groups particularly the Taliban. A deadly bombing striking a vehicle of staffers of the Moby Media Group left many casualties from the employees of the well-known Tolo TV channel

and its sister outlets operating under Moby group. This came as the biggest single incident taking casualties from the media sector in Afghanistan. The attack on staff members of the Moby media group came after the Taliban accused two private TV channels of bias in reporting from the conflict in Kunduz province last year. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the attack on staffers of Moby group was the largest in its scale against the media in Afghanistan. It was in fact a declaration of war against the free press, something the Taliban had avoided in the past fifteen years of the conflict. The attack changed to whole situation for operation of media channels and works of reporters reporting. The incident indicated Afghanistan was remaining one of the most dangerous countries for journalists and operation of free press. With the attack in Kabul, the already precarious environment for Afghan journalists became particularly unsafe as most of reporters and media employees do not feel safe anymore.

Designating media organizations as legitimate military targets is indicating a shift in Taliban approach to the freedom of expressions and the activities of the free press. Pursuing more aggressive militant campaigns on the ground, the militants aim to further boost the group's propaganda machine along with its military offensive. However, the free and independent press in the country is viewed by the militants as the biggest hurdle against their war propagandas. Despite the Taliban targeting employees of government and foreign forces in past over a decade, the group had relatively better approach to reporters, keeping the promise to not harm the media members and reporters.

However, the Taliban's mindset is not changed in considering freedom of expression as a threat against the group's ideology. The rise of militant attacks against media members suggest the Taliban have shifted approach and aim to also revenge the media outlets that do not trust on Taliban sources and refuse to include Taliban comments.

The deterioration of security for the media organizations is having a broader impact on freedom of expression in the country. The Afghan journalists and employees of media groups are beginning to impose self-censorship on their reporting from the scenes and reflecting the facts as they are. This is because every individual is concerned with his or her security. The Taliban must remain committed to safety of Afghan journalists. Protecting media members is a basic obligation of all parties in the conflicts, and all sides including the militant groups must protect journalists and members of the media.

The government needs to do more to safeguard freedom of expression and protect media members. It needs to do more to safeguard the free press in Afghanistan by not only suppressing the militant groups and improving security but also pursuing government officials and pro-government warlords who commit atrocities against journalists and other media members.

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Reinventing Europe

By Joschka Fischer

Since 2009, when the financial crisis that started in America in 2008 shook the eurozone to its core, crisis management has become Europe's new normal. Indeed, crisis has followed crisis in Europe, and this is unlikely to change anytime soon.

Europe has had a financial crisis, a Greek crisis, a Ukraine crisis, and, since the late summer of 2015, a refugee crisis. And now, with the UK, one of the European Union's strongest member states economically and militarily, holding a referendum on June 23 on whether to leave the EU (so-called Brexit), Europe could soon be facing a secession crisis.

Indeed, a massive crisis of trust vis-à-vis Europe and its institutions has developed in most EU member states, fueling a revival of nationalist political parties and ideas and a slackening of European solidarity. The re-nationalization of Europe is accelerating, making this crisis the most dangerous of all, as it threatens disintegration from within.

The EU's political leaders - the heads of state and government of the member states and the leaders of the European Council and the European Commission - made a fateful decision in the wake of the financial crisis. They placed their trust in crisis-mode management, rather than developing a vision for Europe and a strategy to achieve it.

Strategic management of Europe would have required making the necessary compromises, which no doubt would have entailed political risks in all member states. Instead, EU leaders chose to let the reality of the various crises do the work for them, placing their faith in the force of circumstances. But this approach, born of cowardice and misplaced cunning, had its price, too: To its citizens, an EU that moves only in crisis mode is the very image of incompetence, unworthy of their confidence - no longer the solution to the old continent's problems, but simply another problem.

After almost six decades of successful integration, Europe has become a large feature of everyday life - a political, economic, institutional, and legal reality. But all of Europe's manifestations depend on the vitality of its underlying idea, of its soul. If this idea dies among Europe's citizens and peoples, the EU will come to an end, not with a bang but with a long, torturous whimper.

Things cannot go on like this; too much - the future of our continent in a world of rapid change - is at stake. A policy of

baby steps is no longer enough. Without a renewed vision of Europe and an effective approach to dealing with crises, the continent's new (and old) nationalists will continue to gain in strength and jeopardize the entire project of peaceful integration on the basis of the rule of law.

The Brexit referendum will point the way, both for the UK and for the EU as a whole. It will be followed either by sighs of relief (as I hope) or a cataclysm that rocks the EU to its core and brings disaster to the UK. But, however the British decide, Europe's numerous crises need to be addressed.

The financial crisis is anything but over; it has only taken on a new political guise. Portugal, Spain, and Ireland have shown that democratic majorities are no longer willing to endure the cure-or-kill treatment of austerity politics. And the Greek crisis is coming to a boil again.

The euro might not survive. Despite signs of a moderate economic recovery in the eurozone, the gap between Germany and most other eurozone countries is widening and deepening. There is no longer any talk of convergence in the monetary union, and there hasn't been for a long time.

And yet it is clear that if the euro fails, the whole European project will fail with it. Europe's leaders know that the euro is still anything but crisis-proof, despite technical improvements achieved during the previous crisis.

Unless a renewed grand compromise is reached between Germany and other eurozone countries, it never will be. In practice, this would mean reforming the eurozone on the basis of deeper political integration - obviously no mean feat.

The same applies to the EU's joint security, protection of external borders, and a reformed European refugee policy. Here, too, effective political leadership requires a renewed vision for a united Europe in the twenty-first century - what it can and must provide, how it should be constituted, and what institutions and powers it requires.

There is no reason for Europe to fear crises. They set things in motion and provide an opportunity for the EU to move forward and become stronger, provided one faces them without fear of the accompanying political risks.

Once the UK has spoken this June, Europe must give its answer - courageously and with a vision and real solutions. Nationalism is not the answer.

Only genuine Europeans can ensure a peaceful, prosperous future for Europe. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for



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