

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



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Insecurity - A Major Challenge for Afghanistan

Kabul once again experienced an insurgent attack on Wednesday, wherein a convoy of foreign troops was targeted by a suicide bomber. As a result of the attack, eight civilians were killed and at least 24 others were wounded. While, as per the statement by spokesman for US Forces Afghanistan, Navy Captain William Salvin, three coalition service members sustained non-life threatening wounds as the convoy was a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) convoy. The attack was claimed by Daesh. The attacks by Daesh have now become frequent in Afghanistan, particularly, in capital Kabul. Only few months earlier, Afghan officials used to deny that Daesh had stronghold in Afghanistan, but the consecutive and large-scale attacks by Daesh insurgents clearly depict that those denials were based on no authentic information.

Now, the officials are not even in the position to deny the fact that Daesh is getting stronger in Afghanistan and that points towards a very bleak future as far as security and stability are concerned.

This attack has come only few weeks after the attack on 209 Shaheen Corps Headquarters in Balkh, wherein around 150 soldiers were killed. Moreover, Kabul, itself, has not yet forgotten the brutal attack on Army Hospital that took the lives of many Afghan soldiers. In fact, the statistics show that Afghan forces have been facing a larger number of casualties since the drawdown of international forces. US government's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) earlier said in its report for 2016 that 6,785 Afghan security force members were killed in the year, and another 11,777 were wounded. Comparing it with the previous reports revealed an increase of about 35 percent against the same period in 2015, when some 5,000 security forces were killed. The dual threats of Daesh and Taliban have created major security challenges for Afghan security forces, this year as well. Since Taliban have also announced their spring offensive, the coming few months would be really tough for Afghan forces and people. Therefore, it is really imperative that they get fully prepared to face any sort of situation. Moreover, they will try to strengthen their positions in different parts of country. SIGAR's earlier analysis of the data provided by US Forces in Afghanistan (USFOR-A) suggested that the security situation in Afghanistan had not improved. The numbers of Afghan security forces were decreasing, while both casualties and the number of districts under insurgent control or influence were increasing. USFOR-A found that about 57.2 percent of the country's 407 districts were under Afghan government control or influence as of November 15, 2016 - a 6.2 percent decrease from the 63.4 percent reported the previous quarter ending late August, and a nearly 15 percent decrease since November 2015. Of the 407 districts of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, 233 districts were under government control (83 districts) or influence (150), 41 districts (in 15 provinces) were under insurgent control (9) or influence (32), and 133 districts were "contested." The report described contested districts as having "negligible meaningful impact from insurgents," contending that neither the insurgency nor the Afghan government maintained significant control over these areas.

The data clearly shows that the nature of insecurity would be threatening for Afghan government and security forces this year as well. Taliban and Daesh, among other insurgents, have already increased their activities. There are fears among the people in Afghanistan that their lives would once again be influenced badly by the wave of terrorism and insurgency. After the downfall of Taliban, Afghan people had hoped that their lives would change and the circumstances would lead towards a better and peaceful future, but the last few years have pointed towards worsening security situation. The response of the government in the face of the rising insecurity is really lethargic. It has been largely influenced by the differences that prevail within the ranks of National Unity Government (NUG) regarding the approach that has to be adopted against the situation. The members of NUG see the issue with different perspectives and are not ready to cooperate with each other in designing a comprehensive and unanimous policy to tackle the situation. This has led to misunderstandings and ambiguities in the war against terrorism on operational level as well. Afghan government, therefore, has to get united and strive to control the situation properly. It needs to understand that as a result of decades of instability and socio-economic and political problems, the Afghan people have been suffering from myriads of problems. Coupled with the issue of insecurity, there are some very concerning issues that exist in our society and threaten the lives of the common people of Afghanistan.

Afghan government must therefore get serious in tackling the issue of the insecurity and strive to protect valuable human resource. ANDSF are vital for the peace and tranquility of the country.

Though their profession requires them to be on the forefront of the war, proper strategic planning and policy making by the government officials can support them in achieving peace without having to lose many valuable lives. Moreover, proper strategies can assist the government in building its legitimacy and gaining support among the people, who otherwise seem to have lost their hopes about a tranquil and prosperous future.

Freedom of Expression

By Hujjatullah Zia

Freedom is men's natural and inalienable right. People are free to speak what they have in their mind - which is called freedoms of thought and expression. One has to raise their voice against cruelty and injustice done to them. There are many ways for expressing one's thoughts and opinions, including verbal and written statements. Similarly, there are several ways and tones for expressing one's ideas and feelings. For instance, one's words will be fraught with bitter sarcasm or flattery and kind tone.

One will illustrate their thought through drawing, painting, caricaturing or doing satire, yet there are some restrictions and setbacks before all freedoms, including freedom of speech.

In modern world, media play a key role in this regard, mainly social media such as Facebook, Twitter and so on. A person can simply share his/her thought via social media and feel freedom of expression to the last end. Now the question is that what will catch your eye while scrolling down your Facebook?

No doubt, you will not only see your friends' photos and their memorable times - prompting you to push the "Like Button" or express your feelings through posting a "Sticker" - but also absurd words and pictures for entertainment.

In other words, since cyberspace bestows a boundless freedom of speech, people express their personal thoughts in ruthless tone and abusive words. They fill the air with absurdities.

Perhaps, some seek to show off through such absurdities but others break the lumps in their throats likely to be rife in countries where freedoms of thought and speech have been much restricted.

Afghanistan has been beset by war and violence for decades. Afghans have suffered indescribable pains and anguish and their freedoms were curtailed on a large scale. They were silenced despite being oppressed and killed. Political parties and warring factions suppressed their voice for their rights and justice. Afghan women were particularly vulnerable to all political upheaval and ideological mindsets and underwent greater agonies.

So, it is believed that decades of outpouring of grief without the right to breathe a word filled the nation with a strong sense of anger. Similarly, people were traumatized by deadly wars and still suffer from suicide bombings and terrorist attacks.

Now they will raise their voice and express their anger in the strongest possible way. This surge of emotions will cool down after some generations if militancy

ends. A number of individuals target religious beliefs and cultural values of a society via writing in social media. Seemingly, they intend to spread awareness or claim being intellectuals.

However, it is believed that this will do more harm than good and an intellectual is not supposed to attack on people's faith ruthlessly. This act will hurt the public feelings and trigger a sense of hatred.

It should be noted that there is no absolute freedom in human societies. One is free to the extent that they do not harm the freedoms of others. That is to say, freedom - be it freedom of thought, expression, religion, etc. - has its own limits and boundaries.

No one is at liberty to cross the red line or violate an individual or collective freedom. The Constitution of Afghanistan states in article 24 as, "Liberty is the natural right of human beings.

This right has no limits unless affecting others freedoms as well as the public interest, which shall be regulated by law...."

On the other hand, when the public fight for freedom within the frame of law, the state is not supposed to suppress their voice. People have to fight for their freedoms and raise their eyebrows in case of having their rights trampled upon. Constitutionally, "Liberty and human dignity are inviolable.

The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." So, the state will have to uphold citizens' fundamental rights, which include freedoms. Most significantly, the staff of media should be able to point out government's deficiencies and officials' negligence free from fear of prosecution.

In brief, the media, along with civil society activists, have the responsibility to supervise the government and reveal any shortcomings to the public.

It is self-explanatory that fighting for freedom - mainly freedoms of speech and thought - is significant, but what is more important is having something valuable to say. For example, when one shouts for freedom, s/he will have to have well-thought-of words for people and society.

Otherwise, what will be the use of freedom of speech? To put it succinctly, a nation should defend its rights and express its concerns about social ills, political syndrome, moral decline, etc. - with due respect to the rights and liberty of others - under the aegis of freedom of speech. Indeed, freedom of speech is a great blessing for both a person and a nation and should be used in the best possible way.

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Twists of Purple Flowers

By Mohammad Eshaq Arifi

Nowadays the purple flowers of poppy have embellished the desert of southern Afghanistan more beautifully than its brown sherbet does, which has given twists to the policy towards opium. Poppy has affected the regional and international trades and policy seriously. A large number of countries, institutions, individuals and Mafia bands have been involved in the issue of poppy. Poppy manages the bulk of decades of wars in which policy and economy have been tangibly intertwined.

There are streams of blood and horrific destructions behind the view of purple flowers. Millions of people have been filled with nonstop tragedies and horror. Burning, purple bullets of poppy target human emotions every day and inflict indescribable pain and sufferings upon scores of people.

In addition to the shelling of purple bullets taking place in the arenas of war and economy, its bitter sherbet pushes countless of individuals to the ugly quagmire of addiction and results in their dishonor, homelessness and lack of identity. Of course, behind this mesmerizing and attractive view, men's world of delight, pleasure and love die silently and individuals' fresh figures weaken and fall down.

The second aspect behind the purple flowers of poppy is political hurdles that has posed threat to this fertile land. The serious slogans of counternarcotic - which includes its cultivation and smuggling - on the one hand, and increase in poppy's production and its gross value to billions of dollars on the other hand, has compounded the political hurdles - this fact was followed by the arrival of international forces in Afghanistan and deployment of British forces in Helmand.

The purple flowers and plants did not wither despite the fact that Afghan government campaigned against drug through establishing Counternarcotic Ministry, Counternarcotic Department in the Ministry of Interior and Justice Court for a serious fight against drugs and spent billions of dollars in this respect.

It is more likely that there is no strong and serious determination regarding campaign against this phenomenon. More than a decade campaign against a natural phenomenon is considered a long period. This purple plant was expected to wither or end during this period of time. However, the plant not only did not stop growing but developed more than ever before with the passing of each year and still manages the bands and Mafia's war and trade.

No policy has been implemented seriously to eliminate

this sinister phenomenon and the agenda for fighting poppy has been proved abortive.

It seems that changing mentalities will be one of the most significant solutions so as to put an end to this problem. The counternarcotic planners and policy-makers need to view this sinister phenomenon through the lens of humanity rather than policy and trade. The epidemic of addiction is an ugly fact which damages the dignity and esteem of mankind before than anything else and inflicts painful anguish and endless pains on groups of women, children and families.

Imagine the fact when mothers see their children in the dirty and polluted quagmire and the children observe their fathers in the depressed state of addiction. The story continues as women meet their husbands in hovels and families exchange looks next to opium fireplaces. Indeed, their human dignity and self-esteem will turn to ashes before the opium burns and the gushes of shame will squeeze their throats before the dark smoke of the opium. Hence, the mentalities should be redirected to this aspect. One will be hopeful for a positive result if they view this fact from the human lens. The heads of purple trades and policy will have to focus their attention on this aspect and seek to revive humanity.

Based on a recent report released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction's (SIGAR), opium production increased 43 percent in 2016 despite an \$8.5 billion USD counternarcotic campaign investment by US agencies.

The main reason behind this increase is said to be "deteriorating security conditions, a lack of political will and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics' ineffective management all contributed to the paltry eradication results in 2016." It added that poppy "cultivation remained near historically high levels compared with the past several decades."

The addiction to purple flowers is a matter of public concerns and a stain on the country and officials. This sinister phenomenon does not only harden the families but also the face of this country since groups of citizens are slithering in this overwhelming grief.

A serious strategy is to be adopted in order to put an end to this sinister phenomenon and a widespread military, educational and human campaigns should be launched to prevent from further damage of Afghans' dignity and honor.

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