

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



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Afghans – The Casualty of Fundamentalism

The nascent democracy in Afghanistan has been hampered by the Taliban's guerrilla-style attacks. The protected war has never been mitigated despite sacrifices made by Afghan government. The gory incidents continue. Gushes of blood lead to outpouring of grief. Bodies of men, women and children are riddled with bombs and bullets. People are killed without an iota of mercy on the grounds of their caste, color and creed. The life and dignity of mankind are trampled upon by terrorist groups which operate under radical ideologies. Seeking to protect the rights and dignity of individuals, Afghan soldiers are slayed in cold blood. We are only counting the fatalities and sending messages of condemnation to warring parties.

The US government's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) says 807 troops from the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) died between January 1 and February 24. "Afghanistan remains in the grip of a deadly war. Casualties suffered by [ANDSF] in the fight against the Taliban and other insurgents continue to be shockingly high," says the report.

According to SIGAR, 6,785 Afghan soldiers and police officers were killed between January 1 and November 12, 2016, with another 11,777 wounded. The SIGAR report also shows that civilian casualties in 2016 were the highest since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began recording them in 2009. That count found conflict-related civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose to 11,418 in 2016, including 3,498 killed and 7,920 wounded.

The April 19 attack on a military base outside the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif was considered highly shocking and outraged the national conscience. This attack, which killed and wounded hundreds of unarmed soldiers, is believed to be the deadliest one against Afghan soldiers that has ever happened.

The heavy casualties inflicted upon Afghan civilians and soldiers will fill one with a strong sense of disappointment. The post-Taliban democratic government could not stop the bleeding. The heart-wrenching stories repeat one after another. In other words, parents and children's sufferings continue unabated. No panacea has been found out for Afghans' chronic pain. The radical ideology of fundamental groups is replete with boundless barbarity since the ideologue fighters spill the blood of mankind without a tinge of guilt. The Taliban and self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) know no boundaries for their cruelty. Their hands are red with the blood of innocent individuals.

To one's unmitigated surprise, the radical groups show strong sensitivity to moral corruption but not to bloodshed. To think in the frame of Islamic sharia, the Holy Koran says, "Whoever kills a person, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he had killed all men. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all men" (Al-Maeda Verse no: 32). Hence, shedding the blood of an innocent person is similar to killing all mankind.

On the other hand, their sensitivity to moral turpitude is no more than an ostentatious act. For instance, both the groups are widely involved in moral corruptions. It has been reported constantly that the Taliban had raped their male students, this was revealed by their own students who were captured by Afghan soldiers. The retribution for this act is death in Islamic sharia. Similarly, the ISIL group has been raping women and children on the grounds of their sex, color and belief. Worst of all, this group declared Jihad-e-Nikah intending to color their moral corruptions with the brush of religion. This is a direct deviation from the right path and a flagrant violation of religious tenets. Such acts of fundamental groups are strong blow to religion. This is believed to be the very reason behind Islamophobia in western countries. It is self-explanatory that when a large number of fundamental groups operate under the aegis of religion, without having basic knowledge about it, this will lead to a disaster. To sum up, the ideology of fundamental groups is void not only of religious tenets but also of ethical code and humanity.

Indeed, democracy has sustained strong blows mainly from the insurgent groups. Counting fatalities and hearing or reading heart-wrenching stories every day in a democratic country seem ridiculous. The nonstop sufferings and heavy casualties in Afghanistan put democracy under serious question. It is believed that a democratic country does not necessarily mean to have a democratic constitution when political rehearsal goes against it. The country's constitution hold people's rights, liberty and dignity in respect – this is in ideal world but violated realistically. In addition to having a constitution based on democratic values, presidential and provincial elections, and parliament, protecting people's fundamental rights i.e. rights to life, liberty and estate and natural dignity is far significant for a democratic society.

It is hoped the government will take high steps in safeguarding the rights and dignity of Afghans and reinforce the soldiers to retaliate the past casualties. It is further prayed that Afghan nation will no further be a casualty of radical mindsets and fundamental ideology of militant groups.



Government and Cases of Violence against Journalists

By Syed Asif Husaini

War and violence hamper progress in many fields in Afghanistan including the media. The media staffs, alike other citizens, suffer from violence more than anything else. The ground of violence against Afghan journalists seems to be different from other countries. Perhaps violence against journalists will be exercised by the state in other countries, which will be prosecuted. However, violence against Afghan journalists is beyond prosecution. In Afghanistan, both the state and journalists suffer from war and suicide attacks and social violence, which pose threat to all Afghans. Journalists bear the brunt of violence for working in the field.

It goes without saying that the state is responsible to protect the rights of all citizens, including the journalists, in any conditions. The responsibility of security and judicial institutions are far significant.

Ill-fatedly, only few cases of violence against journalists, out of hundreds, have been judged. In Afghanistan's judicial institution or ministry of Information and Culture, there is not a single database to provide the cases of violence against journalists or offer them to the media. So, there is no source of information about violence against journalists and reports collected by security institutions are really disorganized and different. There is not a certain statistics for media about the investigation of violence against journalists. According to reports released by the representatives of Media and Journalists Federation in joint committee of journalist safety, 421 cases of violence took place against journalists which was sent to security organization and 13 of which were sent to Foreign Ministry by the federation without receiving answer. In short, the state could send a convincing answer neither to journalists nor to people in this regard.

Journalists Safety Committee decided to establish a commission with the combination of deputy chief of Interior Ministry, representatives of the Security Council, the General Directorate of National Security, Media and Journalists Federation and Deputy head of the Publication department of Ministry of Information and Culture so as to differentiate the cases of violence against journalists and sent them to Attorney General and also share them to people through the media. But there is no result despite the passing of two months and half.

Based on a report released by the Ministry of Culture and Information, about 101 cases of violence against journalists have been registered last year. Out of this number, 13 were the cases of death and the others included beatings, threats and injuries. From 101, only 9 cases have been judged by the Attorney General and others are said to be under judicial in-

vestigation.

Investigation of violence against journalists did not meet the expectations. A number of last year cases have not been investigated yet and this trend continues. Despite this fact, Afghan media has fulfilled their duties in reporting without fear. It comes as journalists and media are not able to continue their activities under the Taliban dominated areas. Likewise, a number of governors and local officials do not respect the independence of journalists in some provinces.

In the latest ranking of press freedom in the world, Afghanistan has retained 120th position, which is considered a positive outcome. However, there is much for the government to do so as to prevent violence against journalists.

Last month, Afghan government released its achievements vis-à-vis protection of freedom of expression and supporting media, while a journalist was not allowed to ask question in the last President's press conference. Based on this report, the presidential office's outcomes include: establishing a law of monitoring access to information; asking the UN to introduce a special envoy to address the journalists' problems; providing procedures for journalists safety; investigating the cases of violence against journalists; sending a formal note to security agencies for developing clear procedures regarding security officers' behavior with journalists and including this issue in the educational texts of security forces; and reducing the cost of registering private media.

But the investigation of violence against journalists has not been mentioned explicitly. It has been mentioned implicitly that the President has issued commands to ensure the journalists' safety and their access to information and to investigate the case of violence against them.

One of the government's significant outcomes in upholding the journalists' rights is the establishment of joint committee of journalists' safety, which has been noteworthy for national and international institutions.

In their recent reports, reporters without borders have appreciated the joint committee of journalists' safety and said that despite great concerns, Afghanistan was one of those rare countries which had established the joint committee for journalists' safety. This committee, in which government officials and journalists' representatives are present, had been established for supporting the media and journalists. They added that such measurements had ensured the Afghanistan's constancy in universal ranking.

It is hoped that Afghan government will adopt effective mechanism for safeguarding the journalist's rights and protecting its years of achievements.

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China is a Great Country with Hospitable People - a Memory of Afghan Journalists of China Tour

By Abdul Haleem and Rahmat Alizadah

What I have found during my visit to China is absolutely against what I heard and knew about China and its people in the past. I have found that the Chinese people are friendly and hospitable," said Sayed Mujibullah Turan, a member of an Afghan media team that visited China recently.

"We had been warmly received wherever we went during our visit to China and contrary to my expectations we had seen modern cities with developed society, prosperous living condition and media development," Turan recalled. Expressing his impression about China and its people, Turan noted that, "peaceful environment, comfortable life and variety of dishes on dining tables clearly depict the flourishing living condition of Chinese people in their country."

A 30-member Afghan media personnel and journalists attended a 20-day seminar, which ended in Beijing on April 30. At the "2017 Afghanistan Media Management Seminar," veteran lecturers and media experts from the host country shared their experiences with Afghan counterparts.

Seminar crews had also accompanied the Afghan media team to media organizations, cultural sites, museums, industrial parks and universities in some cities outside Beijing, including Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region with a large number of Hui minority of Muslim ethnic group.

During the visit to Ningxia, the Afghan media team had enjoyed natural beauty of the autonomous region besides visiting the Sand Lake Ecological Park and the Great Mosque in Najiahu of Yongning County where the Muslims practice their religious rituals.

"Preserving the centuries-old mosque and safeguarding cultural heritages demonstrate the millenniums old civilizations of China and its people on the globe," another member of Afghan media team Mansoor Masoudullah observed.

"As I have realized that the Chinese generally are culture-friendly people and they love their civilizations and that is why they have preserved their civilizations ranging from rock painting, the Great Wall, Forbidden City until contemporary history of China," Masoudullah said.

"My information about China was no more than few words in the past, but the visit has enriched my knowledge and have understood that China is a great nation and its people are hard working and hospitable," Masoudullah continued. Hailing China's rich culture, hospitable tradition and its rapid development, another member of the Afghan media delegation Jamsheed Haidari noted that the culture of peace-loving, hardworking, honesty and patriotism of Chinese people have made their country as the world's second largest economic power.

Recalling his sweet memories and hospitality of the Chi-

nese people, Haidari said he was coming to his hotel by taxi late night in Yinchuan city, capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but the taxi driver, a Muslim guy from Hui ethnic group, rejected to receive the drive fee by saying, "you are our guests here in our city."

As a sign of being hospitable people, some members of the Afghan media delegation had been invited for lunch or dinner by their Chinese friends who had served in Afghanistan over the past 15 years and had developed friendships with Afghans.

Several Chinese friends, including a young female journalist Lin Jing who had worked as Xinhua's correspondent in Afghanistan for 2007 to 2009 and Xinhua journalist Chen Shan who served in Kabul from 2012 to 2015, had also hosted the writer of this story Abdul Haleem and other Afghan friends quite a few times.

The Afghan media team's Chinese guides especially Lv Xinjia and Feng Yin, who are serving as assistant directors of International Communication Training Department with Training Center of the China International Publishing Group, were very kind persons and had spared no efforts to help Afghan journalists get maximum benefit from the multi-faceted tour. "To be frank, I have been greatly impressed by China's rapid economic development, construction of modern cities, having efficient transport system, prosperous living conditions and peaceful environment," another team member Fatihulbari said.

China has also made tremendous progress in media as more than 4,000 local and national television channels are operating alongside countless online and traditional media outlets in the country. The state-owned Xinhua News Agency and the China Central Television are among the leading news services in the world.

Afghanistan and China are two neighboring countries with cordial relations over centuries but many Afghans have little knowledge about China. "I have visited many countries but China's fast development particularly its economic development is beyond imagination," said another Afghan media team member Najiba Maram.

The culturally rich China with a civilization of more than 5,000 years old is the third largest country in land area after Russia and Canada and the most populous country in the world with more than 1.3 billion people.

However, the rate of poverty in China, according to lecturers of the seminar, is 5 percent and the Chinese government has pledged to bring it to zero by 2020 in the heavily-populated country.

Expressing her memories during her stay in China, veteran Afghan female journalist Maram said, "China is a great nation with hospitable people.

We should be proud of having such a great neighbor and should also learn from its experiences in the rebuilding process of Afghanistan." (Courtesy Xinhua)



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