

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



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Poverty Climbs to Threatening 54% in Afghanistan

It is not only insecurity that is threatening Afghanistan. There are many other major issues that remain neglected, and among them poverty is the most prominent one. Though Afghanistan has been receiving billions of dollars in aid, the poverty rate in Afghanistan seems to have inclined, instead of declining, which raises some very serious questions about the utilization of the aid money and also the loyalty and determinations of the responsible authorities in Afghanistan.

A survey conducted by Central Statistics Organization (CSO) recently disclosed that the country's poverty ratio is around 54%, which shows a 21 percent upsurge since the ratio recorded ten years earlier. These figures are really disheartening, and they raise doubts about the overall transition to democracy and development. This is the era wherein the country had to improve as far as the basic issues are concerned; however, discouraging observations make the common people think that they have to wait for decades as far real development is concerned.

It has to be realized that poverty is a threat for our society. It is responsible for myriads of social evils and disturbances. It is a quagmire that not only grasps the society from its legs but also claps an individual from his throat. A poor person does not only suffer from aching of starvation but also from the discriminating behavior of the society.

All a poor person goes through during destitution is the agony of poverty. In that agony, there is hunger, disease, grief and lengthy days and nights. Hunger is the worst of them. And then a country suffering from poverty tends to have more social problems, just like our country Afghanistan. Corruption, theft, drug addiction and even terrorism, in some or other, are connected to poverty. There are thieves who steal in order to feed their families who are suffering from starvation. There are youngsters, who having found no job and having no sources of income join terrorists who promise them some money. There are many others of the youngsters who have become suicide bombers and can be bought for some hundreds of dollars. And then there are the ones who have given up struggling against the cruel poverty and opted for drugs – at least addiction minimizes their pain and make them more forgetful of their miserable lives.

However, these facts are never pondered upon. Corruption, theft and drug addiction are now being related to 'Criminal Genes' and 'Filthy Blood'. It is said that thieves, addicts and terrorists are so because of their nature. However, the actual fact is being covered. The social circumstances and the irresponsible human attitude that are basically responsible for most of the poverty are not being discussed.

It can be easily observed that there are many people in our society who work from dawn till dusk, with all the energies they have and still they are poor and their families do not have rudimentary requirements of life and then there are few others who are born in rich families, do nothing and still have all the luxuries of life. This is not even fortune or luck; it is the socio-economic set up that has made such a tragic reality possible. It is supporting the rich to become richer and pushing the poor deeper in the abyss of destitution.

We, human beings, require changing our perceptions. It is weird how we are not able to see the suffering of the millions whom we experience every day, but we are able to focus our attentions towards the things that are less important and more destructive. We are ready to exert our energy for weapons, wars and ways of annihilating others but never concentrate on how we can help a poor person who is living from hand to mouth in our immediate neighborhood. This is, in fact, the biggest injustice that we are doing to our own specie. Dwight D. Eisenhower beautifully clarifies this fact, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron."

Our country Afghanistan also requires fighting the menace of poverty seriously as more than half the population now lives below the poverty line. All the other fights relating to insecurity, terrorism, corruption and crimes must be dealt as secondary and all the efforts must be diverted for slaying the giant of poverty; otherwise, all the efforts would end up in smoke and the giant of poverty would stand victorious over the corpses of the poor!



Radical Police Reforms Needed to Prevent Suicide Attacks on Cities & Civilians in Afghanistan

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

As the country is grinding at war with international terrorists organizations since last one and half decade, Afghanistan government is yet to come up with a war strategy directed at types, styles and tactics used by these terrorists. Though the present army and police forces are relatively new, and established during the ongoing war on terror, the onus of responsibility for their training, modus operandi of operations, directions and setting objectives still lies on the shoulders of government leadership and senior military and police officers. Today's warfare tactics are no secret as countries in this region in particular and around the world in general have already experienced these types of wars during last 50 years. Examples of these countries include Sri Lanka, Tamil Tigers had waged insurgent war against central government for forty years until they were defeated in 2009. India continues to tackle insurgent war in its Assam, Punjab, Kashmir and other provinces, Colombia has grappled with very much the same kind of war with FARC insurgents for fifty years. United Kingdom was struggling at war with Irish insurgents for more than a decade. Experience of these countries and set of knowledge built up during their struggle to quell insurgents can be of tremendous help in imparting specialized fighting skills, reconnaissance, intelligence skills and observation and identification tactics, which are critically important for a police force engaged at war with ideological insurgents and terrorist organizations.

Police is a soft arm of the State, primarily for internal security. It is the only state institution allowed to use force in peace times. Police is accountable to criminal justice system, community and government through established mechanisms. But police force in Afghanistan lacks credible accountability system in place. In addition they do not have well established mechanism of operations involving different level of policing activities, and priorities. This is one of the most important reasons that duties of army and police are mixed up, although they are different in their doctrines with some degree of operational overlapping depending on circumstances. Unless these two organizations are segregated in terms of duties by installing doctrines and appropriate structures of command and control and accountability, Afghanistan will continue to struggle and can suffer more casualties in the ongoing war on terror. Military should largely be accountable to the state and its government, and police institutions should be accountable to justice system, government and community. Military always follows the principles of proportionality of targets, and deploys force to destroy targets with less restriction on the quantum of force. Proportionality of force is the fundamental principle of police and hence, its use is incrementally successive and proportional to threats. Military actions may not follow activation of criminal justice system, but police actions are entailed with criminal justice system and appropriate accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms harmonize the needs of the government and the communities with judicial oversight. Other areas for improvement include proper investigation after occurrence of incidence. There have been many clues for classical and forensic investigations at bombing and suicide sites, but these clues are seldom exploited fully. The persons who had committed suicide and had died in the act, are not investigated thoroughly. Accepted norms should be to take the body, carry out judicial autopsy and identify the body through investigative clues. There are chances that important clues could emerge for obtaining links that can lead to center and support of the network dispatching these suicide idiots for attacks.

Ministry of Interior should field highly trained police officers and personnel to the field for patrol round the clock in major city centers and to areas crowded with high density of population. These police contingents should be part of a strategy that should include cooperation of people in the area, use of technology such as security cameras, metal explosive identifying tools, detective tools, behavioral psychology, checkpoints and a network

of spies and observers throughout population centers. This mechanism should be duplicated and put in place in major cities and districts. Police in metropolitan cities including in Delhi trained police personnel to eye contact, watch for behavior and non verbal symptoms of individuals on the streets and observe activities of people appearing strange in their behavior, which had paid big dividends in bringing relative reduction in the beginning and complete elimination of bombing incidents. Police also sensitized people to observe symptoms with massive campaigns. In addition, police behavior with general public and their treatment of people should be characterized in the framework of high morale and civilized manners. As mentioned above, police is the soft arm of government and any mistreatment on the part of police of general public can backfire severely – especially in societies where insurgents and terrorist groups are working hard to conscript fighters in their ranks. Bad manners and mishandling of general public by police and other security and government officials can backfire severely.

International community including United Nations and other friendly countries, mainly the United States of America, has undertaken huge training programs for Afghanistan police force. Billions of US dollars have been expended in the form of contract awards to DynCorp International, a US firm to train Afghan police force. But these training programs were devised and undertaken in the form spasmodic response to the changes that would occur in US policy about their Afghanistan intervention and mostly these were military led, more trained in militaristic role and doctrine. There was no long-term strategy and research on the ground as to in what framework should the training begin, and what kind of training was needed for the police force to face aggressive attacks by an entrenched insurgency and other terrorist groups. Police and army institutions were embarked almost in identical duties – engaged with enemy at front lines? Highly costly workshops and training sessions were being organized for police officers and personnel at hotels and other expensive commercial buildings in civil areas, which have proved to have had no impact on the level of knowledge and skills of police personnel. These programs suffer with ad hocism without adequate attention to sustainability, continuous delivery and operational necessities. Instead, most drastic ways to organize training sessions should have been taking place inside the police institutions in the halls and training camps, and these could be organized by police trainers from neighboring countries police institutions. This could have left long lasting impact on the training, which could have provided opportunities for our officers to established working relationships with police officers of these friendly, neighboring countries for afterward follow-up on certain professional matters.

In the wake of almost daily fatal terrorist incidents in the country, leadership of the two large security institutions i.e. Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, should work together to address these issues. It is imperative to overhaul operations, command and control structure and modus operandi of the two forces' conducts and effectiveness in the field. Though it might seem unrealistic to completely pull out police force from Insurgency battle fields, Ministry of Interior should plan for this to happen. One solution could be to recruit local militia under direct control and command of Ministry of Interior, which can replace police force fighting along with army personnel at frontlines. Policing of society in its proper manner can earn support from general public. Much of the ongoing incidents of suicide bombings, road side bombing and other types of terrorist attacks can be reduced, which will translate into a more sanguine city life, increased commercial activities and investment. A strong, skillful and knowledgeable police and judicial institutions can evaporate any and all support for insurgency among populations, and people will gather around their legitimate government.

The author is the emerging writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mg.sahibzada.ceo@kainaatgroup.af

A New Economy for the Middle East and North Africa

By Rabah Arezki & Hafez Ghanem

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) possess all of the ingredients they need to leapfrog into the digital future. They have large, well-educated youth populations that have already adopted new digital and mobile technologies on a wide scale. That combination has immense potential to drive future growth and job creation. But will it?

Public spending, the region's historical engine of development, has reached its limit. Because the public sector can no longer absorb the swelling ranks of university graduates, the MENA region now has one of the world's highest rates of youth unemployment.

The digital economy holds the promise of a new way forward, but it is still in its infancy, and young people face obstacles in putting technology to productive use. Although the Internet and hand-held devices are ubiquitous throughout the region, they are currently used for accessing social media, rather than for launching new enterprises.

But there are green shoots emerging. For example, the ride-hailing app Careem has grown from a start-up to a billion-dollar company, creating thousands of jobs in more than 90 cities in the MENA region and in Pakistan and Turkey. And new digital platforms are already connecting job seekers and employers, providing vocational training, and hosting start-up incubators. The challenge now is to create the conditions for these green shoots to grow and multiply.

The first, essential step is for MENA countries to become "learning societies," a phrase coined by the Nobel laureate economist Joseph E. Stiglitz to describe countries in which shared knowledge leads to increased innovation. This, in turn, fosters development; and in the case of MENA, it could lead to the creation of a vibrant digital service economy.

To get there, education systems will need to change. For the region's young people, the curriculum is more often a source of frustration than advancement. The concept of a "skills premium" – the difference in wages between skilled and unskilled workers – dictates that higher educational attainment should lead to higher compensation and more secure employment. Yet in the MENA region, the opposite has happened: university graduates are far more likely to be unemployed than are workers with only a basic education.

Two factors work against the region's young people. First, schools are still geared toward channeling graduates into large public sectors, which means they place less emphasis on fields such as mathematics and science. Second, bloated public sectors are crowding out the private sector, which would otherwise be a larger provider of high-skill, high-wage jobs.

Because the future economy will need technologically capable workers, curricula should be reoriented toward STEM (science, technology, engi-

neering, and mathematics) subjects and away from the social studies that were long prized by public-sector employers.

Moreover, education systems should focus on encouraging greater openness to innovation and risk-taking – a significant departure from the attitudes reproduced under a system of public-sector patronage. Specifically, moving toward an innovative "learning society" will require students to hone their critical-thinking and managerial skills within collaborative work arrangements.

In addition to skills, the digital economy will also need technical infrastructure. Connectivity is a prerequisite for the delivery of new mobile and digital services in e-commerce, vocational training, health care, and finance, all of which could substantially increase overall welfare. Countries in the region thus need to focus on expanding broadband Internet access.

Education and Internet infrastructure geared toward productive use would provide the foundation of a new economy. But ensuring sustained growth in the region will require improving its financial systems as well. A digital economy depends on payment systems that are not just easy to use and widely available, but also trustworthy. Developing effective peer-to-peer payments that require no financial intermediary like a bank will be crucial for ensuring that digital platforms for ride sharing, on-demand tasks, and other services can thrive.

Outside of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which have relatively advanced payment systems, the quality of financial services in the MENA region currently lags behind most of the rest of the world. Barring improvements to the financial system, and to the banking sector in particular, the potential of the region's vast human capital will not be realized.

Lastly, governments will need to develop an approach to regulation that encourages, rather than stifles, innovation. To be sure, ensuring confidence, especially in financial systems, is essential; but regulation must be balanced with policies to boost competition, so that start-ups can easily enter the market and test new ideas. There needs to be more space for more companies like Careem to emerge. Policymakers should look to Kenya's model of light but effective regulation, which has fostered the rapid growth of the peer-to-peer payment system M-Pesa.

Seizing the opportunities that the digital economy offers the MENA region will require a big push. Policymakers will need to work on multiple fronts, while making the best use of all available tools. The sooner they start, the greater the chance that today's young people can overcome economic exclusion and gain more opportunities to realize their – and their region's – full potential.

Rabah Arezki is Chief Economist for the Middle East and North Africa Region at the World Bank. Hafez Ghanem is Vice President of the World Bank for the Middle East and North Africa.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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