

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

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Afghanistan's Drugs Crisis

A US-funded study found this month that there are now more than three millions drug users in Afghanistan, up from 1.6 million in 2012. According to a joint report by Afghanistan's Public Health and Counter Narcotics ministries and US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law enforcement, addiction among Afghans is as high as 11 percent, meaning that 1 of every 9 Afghans are in some ways addicted to drugs. The sharp rise of drug users in Afghanistan is due to the thriving poppy cultivation in last two years. Afghanistan is one of top opium producers in the world, and it produces more than 90 percent of the world's heroin, which is the most addictive substance of the drugs. This is while an investigative report published recently suggest how the United States and the government of Afghanistan failed to pursue high-profile drug lords in Afghanistan. According to the report, many high-profile drug traffickers with international fame have been released from Afghan custody in the past, and even Afghan officials have helped securing their release due to the widespread corruption.

The sharp rise in opium production is attributed to friendly climate for the illegal harvest and the ongoing insurgency in the country. However, the high demands in regional and Western markets are also mentioned as one of the major factors behind Afghanistan's flourishing poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. Without any doubt, the long-lasting insurgency in the country is the most important factor for the failures of the past fourteen years of the international efforts to fight the Afghan opium. During past over-a-decade years of the war, the US-led international coalition as well as the government of Afghanistan have frequently been defocused from their counter narcotics mission in the country. As the US gradually pulled out its forces from Afghanistan, the war on drugs went into a marginal issue while the Afghan government did not have the capability to curb the menace.

Now, after fourteen years of the anti-drug efforts in Afghanistan, the mission is viewed as a failed endeavor. Afghanistan continues to be top illicit drug producer in the world, and drug addiction has reached to a peak with now more than 3 million people using illegal drugs. The government of Afghanistan and the United States have pursued flawed policies regarding combating the menace since 2001. The US funded programs of alternative harvest for Afghan farmers. However, the policy was a major failure as it failed to convince Afghan farmers to cultivate and grow alternative crops. In turn, the Taliban and other insurgent groups mostly encouraged locals to cultivate poppy and they even protected their crops in return for a tax from the harvest.

Back when ruling Afghanistan, the Taliban regime also backed poppy cultivation with the pretext that mostly the Western nations are users of the Afghan-exported drugs. The US-backed government's policies failure and the insurgents' endorsement of the illegal harvest further helped increasing cultivation of poppy crops by Afghan farmers. The drugs market was a major source of funding for the Taliban along with levying taxes on transport sector and charities from the Arab nations. In the last fourteen years, the Taliban, as an insurgent group fighting the US-led coalition and the Afghan government forces, have been immensely benefited from the lucrative drugs market as it was, and still is, the main source of funding.

The drug production and its trafficking have been devastating for the international and the Afghan government's efforts to rebuild the country's economy and to win the war against the militant groups. The opium production continues to finance the insurgency and fueling the unending insurgency and militancy in the country. The poppy cultivation and drug trafficking is further injecting money into Afghanistan's mostly informal and black economy, failing the government in its efforts to promote a formal economy based on legal businesses. In addition to that, Afghans are now the most affected victims of the addictive harvests they grow. It is believed that the current trend of using drugs by Afghanistan will turn into a major threat and a potential crisis for Afghanistan's social security in the future. It is rightly likened to a tsunami that will endanger the very fabric of the country in the long run.

As the recent report suggested, the weak governance and pervasive corruption in the country was a major part of the problem. Due to this, Afghanistan has failed to carry out a decisive combat against drug traffickers who are the most blamed individuals in this illegal market. Afghan officials have helped release of many of major drug traffickers and Afghanistan's judicial system is unable to pursue the so-called drug lords. According to the report, high-profile drug traffickers are freely living in many southern and western provinces and operating their businesses under a de facto protection of corrupt government and judicial officials. The report is a major blow to the government's reputation in fighting drug trafficking as it reveals the extent of the government's failure in pursuing drug lords. If the government does not bring a drastic change in the course of fighting poppy cultivation and drug trafficking, the menace will continue to grow into a major crisis for the country. The new unity government should come to the point and realize the nature of the threat not only for the future of Afghanistan's economy and social order but also for the ongoing anti-insurgency war. The government needs to learn from the previous government's mistakes and seek a long-term approach to overcome the menace.



Wrestling with Economic Challenges

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries on earth with two out of every three of its citizens struggling to provide bread and tea for their families." These words were written by Human Rights Dimension of Poverty in Afghanistan in 2010. But has the situation changed since then?

The tension for the rise of poverty in Afghanistan has increased in circumstances where drought and unemployment have greatly affected the lives of the people and have created great problems for them.

A great number of Afghans are completely illiterate. Among widows, the proportion is much higher. In the old days, it was incumbent on the families of the husbands to look after the widows. Whatever one might think of the practice, in theory, at least, it provided security for vulnerable people. But this is just one part of the social fabric that has collapsed, with nothing to mitigate that loss or replace it. There are too many widows now, too many orphans. Widows cast out from the homes of their in-laws, and their children, have nothing, not even a surname.

The child plays an important economic role in the Afghan family structure, mainly because the little money earned by their parents is hardly enough to feed the hungry mouths in the family. Additionally, due to cultural practices, Afghan mothers rarely choose to seek employment outside their homes. In this situation, the family relies upon the economic contribution of the child, even if it means the child is left begging on the streets.

The consequences which follow their obligation to work are indeed tragic: absence of education, violence and disease linked to pollution and to the drastically changing climate - In summer the temperature goes as high as 40°C or more and in winter the temperature could go down to -20°C.

There are an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 street children in the Afghan capital alone. Among them are those who could not afford an education as refugees in Iran or Pakistan, and are unable to go to school as returnees in Afghanistan because they have to work from dawn to dusk to support their families.

Kabul is awash with street children, hundreds of thousands of them, wandering through rubbish, selling plastic bags, repairing bicycles, laboring for shoe-makers, or asking for alms in return for sending unwelcome wafts of aromatic smoke from the tin cans they wave at likely-looking passers-by.

The number of beggars in the streets of Kabul is on the rise - especially with the approach of summer. Wearing shabby cloths with worn-out shoes, beggars of all descriptions, young and old, disabled and physically fit, scrounge for alms all over the city. They can be seen in every street, market and square as well as in front of five-star hotels or restaur-

rants known for frequenting by foreigners and well-off people.

This is particularly problematic for Afghan children who are refugees after having fled the war. In refugee camps located in Pakistan or in Iran the number of child refugees can be up to 1.5 million. These children find their status illegal and thus they are not entitled to any sort of a civil right as a citizen in the country because they do not have an official legal existence.

Young Afghans are often made victims of violence. In 2009, around 250 children were killed during terrorist attacks - these facts are deeply embedded in poverty. The current militancy and suicide bombings carried out by the Taliban militants have aggravated the situations. The local businessmen fear to invest in the country since there is no guarantee for their lives or properties. A great number of NGOs have left Afghanistan with the withdrawal of foreign troops. The youths are wrestling with unemployment and the simple workmen can hardly make the ends met. A sense of chagrin has circulated among the citizens.

The intensification and spread of the armed conflict in recent months has increased insecurity and exacerbated poverty. Insecurity dominates policy discussions and funding decisions, neglecting the importance of social and economic security that is central to establishing stability and a just and lasting peace.

After all, the most discussed aspect of the abuse of power in Afghanistan is corruption and the diversion of resources, including those allocated by the international community. In 2005 Afghanistan ranked 117 out of 159 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Index. Four years later, Afghanistan was assessed as the second most corrupt country in the world, just ahead of strife-torn Somalia. In 2010, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Afghans paid USD 2.5 billion in bribes over the past year. One Afghan out of two had to pay at least one bribe to a public official.

Afghans have repeatedly, identified "poverty and unemployment as the driving forces behind insecurity", and called for these issues to be addressed as a priority. Some people participate in insurgent activities to acquire an income. Joining anti-government elements or undertaking other illegal activities, such as drug production and trafficking, is often more lucrative, and with immediate returns, than struggling with farming or working in the informal sector for low wages.

Hope government considers the economic constraints and addresses them immediately. In short, since the government commits itself to "strengthen political, social, economic as well as defense institutions and attain a prosperous life and sound living environment for all inhabitants of this land...", it will put these words into practice.

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Secret of Happiness!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

There is a famous quote that, 'Lessons of goodness and repentance are a lot but there are very few who learn anything from these lessons'. Happiness is also a topic of both psychology and philosophy about which lot has been said and written but still it is one of the scarcest things found in the actual world. On one hand, we repeatedly hear and read about cries, anger, loss, grief and other similar things while on the other, we are bombarded by the ways to keep ourselves happy and even then, it is not something that should be easily acquired. My limited knowledge does not permit me to comment on this topic and its underlying philosophy but I have come along some interesting observations about this that I would like to share with the readers.

A few days before, I was invited by a friend of mine to his place. He lives in one of the most famous community towns of the city where a well-facilitated and secure town has been established. Hundreds of well-educated and affluent families reside in this town and are very satisfied of it. The town spreads in a vast area and includes of dozens of residential blocks and hundreds of apartments in these blocks. Some people have bought the apartments while majority of the apartments have been rented by its owner. For some time, we were busy in work of guessing the monthly income of the owner from hundreds of apartments he had rented and trying to compare the level of his authority, satisfaction and happiness. When I was about to ask my friend to conclude this useless estimation of other's wealth and property that the doorbell rang. My friend went to the door and came back smiling, followed by a man. This fat man was hardly carrying himself and appeared in great distress. My friend said, 'Such a coincidence! We were talking about the apartments of Haji Sahib and he himself came here. Please Haji Sahib, sit down and have a cup of tea with us'. Haji Sahib got seated and put his four mobile phones on the desk. We greeted each other and started discussing routine things like security situation, weather and others. But it was quite interesting to observe that he attended a number of phone calls in just a minute or more. When he finished talking on one phone, another started ringing and then the other. Then, when he was about to lift his cup of tea, one of the phones rang. He quietly said something to the caller and picked up the phone. He looked both distressed and ashamed of these. In the end, he quickly finished his tea and took leave from us as phone calls were not going to leave him. We at once felt relieved that we were not having all these apartments, otherwise, we could have never resisted such a stress.

Then my friend gave his long commentary on this, 'I have an uncle of mine and he is also the victim of a similar problem. He has so many businesses and controlling these businesses is not easy. One day, I asked him if these things made him tired and wanted to get rid of these. He said that he was also very tired and wanted to find a solution for it but he was not in position to do so. He used to say, 'If I don't control my businesses, people will deceive me and will eat away my businesses. In this way, all my businesses will finish and I will have no option except to beg for my living. So it is like a sticky hell of which you cannot easily get rid of. Once you fall in this well, it is very difficult to come out.'

Another interesting observation in this regard was shared by another friend of mine. He said, 'I sometimes visit one of my relatives

who remains busy for 15-20 hours every day with business-related issues. One day, when we were sitting together and he was angry on phone at someone about something, I silently came out of his office and went to the backside of the building. There, I heard a loud laughter of some people coming out of a small room. When I entered, I saw three drivers who were free and were busy in laughing about something. I smiled at the comparison that the thing that people think would ensure happiness, makes a person distressed while the absence of the same had freed many of the worries.'

Another person says, 'I am both angry and irritated of my younger brother. When I remain busy with business issues, he only goes to his job. After he comes back from the job, he wears his track-suit and comes to me smiling and says, 'I am so happy, don't be jealous'. This remark really pinches me when he finds me surrounded by unending works and obligations. I just give out a silly smile and see him going to exercise with a smile.'

We had so many similar examples and readers may say that the basic underlying reason behind these are mismanagement, otherwise, if a person can divide his responsibilities or hire assistants for these, he may still live a normal life. I do agree and it is not good to talk against efforts to do business or earn more but it is a strange fact of our society that, the more they earn, the more they seem to be getting short of time for themselves and thus their joyful moments.

But it is one of the biggest blunders that happiness is associated with happy and joyful moments. If these moments are innocent, like playing, listening to music or enjoying the company of friends and family, there is nothing wrong but many people think that those immoral and illegal moments would make us happy that are being prohibited by ethics, our culture and traditions and almost all the religions of the world, then it is very helpless. Famous writer Fethullah Gulen writes, 'Those who claim of living a happy life and making others happy should understand the virtues first. Virtue is being distinguished with the most exalted ethical and moral values, and beholding the whole of existence with love.'

Belief and understanding in virtues would decide upon the nature of happiness you want to acquire. As mentioned earlier, a happiness that is the product of indulging in vices may make you happy for a limited time but it is a generally accepted reality that those who indulge in vices are the most repenting and unhappy as well. The joy drawn out of a vicious act may be short but it is certain that its loss and feeling of loss or repentance lasts for long, depriving the person of any kind of happiness in this long period. It is the reason why, all the religions emphasize on virtues and consider them elements to generate happiness. Its practical example is the virtue of making others happy. Now, this often-repeated theory come to some as a mere claim but those who have learnt to draw happiness by making others happy realize how much sweet and long-lasting this type of happiness is and those who don't believe in it, should at least take a try. We can conclude that without virtues, there is not present any kind of true and stable happiness and once a person gets fully saturated in virtues, he would always be floating in the sweet river of true joys and happiness.

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