

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



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Government Inaction Strengthens Human Smuggling

Insecurity in Afghanistan, though itself a huge problem, has given rise to many other issues as well. Among the problems majorly caused by insecurity are issues of displacement, migration and smuggling of the people. Finding no security in their villages, cities and provinces people are compelled to live their houses and find refuge at somewhere safer. However, they are not always successful to do so as they fall victim to human smugglers and ultimately tragedies and misfortunes. In the presence of such tragedies and their persistent rise, the government officials do not seem serious enough to take tangible actions.

In a recent survey conducted by Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC), it was revealed that poor leadership within government and a surge in violence have led to a sharp rise in human smuggling in Afghanistan. It also revealed that at least 47 percent of Afghans believe that security threats, terrorist attacks and dysfunction within government are the fundamental causes for the increase in human smuggling. HRRAC chief Attaullah Khan said in a statement, "The research indicates that issues such as security threats in different regions of the country are the main reasons for an increase in human smuggling, which shows government's failure. Government has failed to prevent the growth of mafia involved in human smuggling."

Meanwhile, Sher Khan Sahak, a civil society activist said, "UN statistics show that the income achieved from human smuggling is between \$8 and \$31 billion USD annually while the annual income of drug smugglers is not equal to this."

Estimates show that only in the last two years around 300,000 people have left the country in search of peace and tranquility. And, most of them use the illegal ways to do so; therefore, they availed the services of the human smugglers and further strengthened the phenomenon of human smuggling and trafficking. Unfortunately, this continues to a large extent even now. This gives a sort of advantage to the smugglers to generate income by playing with the lives of the people. Currently, Afghanistan is largely hit by this problem and there are many human smugglers in the country, particularly, in the capital Kabul who take advantage of the feelings of those who are desperate and have some sort of inclination for moving towards Europe and other countries.

A recent news report revealed that human smuggling has now taken an organized form and remains unattended by the government, while the people have nothing to do except crying in vain. The report also revealed that people mostly blast government for not doing anything to curb the human smuggling problem and not bringing the perpetrators to justice. People say that human smugglers go about their business freely and openly smuggle people to Europe and a number of money exchangers are also involved in the business; they help human smugglers by holding on to money paid to the smugglers by would-be migrants. This money serves as a type of guarantee and that when a migrant reaches his destination, the money exchanger hands over the money to the smuggler.

The most disturbing aspect of human smuggling is that it includes the risk of life. The illegal ways that are followed within the process include very risky attempts within which the people can easily lose their lives. The border control police or forces in different countries can even shoot the people who try to cross the border illegally. However, the facts show that people consider this choice much better than the lives they are having in their own countries and happily agree to opt it. Another fact is that the people being smuggled do not always involve young men. They also include children, women and even old people and this makes the process even more pathetic.

The government, in this regard, must take tangible steps to curb the situation. It requires adopting both short-term and long-term policies. In its short term policy, it must have no tolerance for the smugglers and strive to bring them to justice. It must make sure that the groups that are active at the moment must not be able to dodge the law-enforcing agencies and must not carry their activities without hesitation. In the long-run, the government can take steps to improve the situation that is compelling the people to leave their country. It can concentrate on the security situation, provide employment opportunities to the people and raise their standard of life.

Government, though, says that it has the issue in consideration, in practice, it has not shown anything tangible. In fact, the government authorities seem to lack the will, intention and honesty. They do not seem to realize the difficulties that the common people have to face because of prevailing circumstances. Once, they start realizing the difficulties of the people that arise because of these issues and be ready to pursue them with true intention and honest efforts, there would be a definite improvement in this regard.

High Birthrate Causing High Death

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Afghanistan is on the 11th highest birth rate in the world, and also the highest birth rate in non-African countries. The first country with the highest birth rate is Niger, a western African country, (at 51.26 births per 1,000 people) but the country with the lowest birth rate is Monaco, at 6.72 births per thousand comparing to Afghanistan has roughly 40 births/1,000 population. Birth rates ranging from 10-20 births per 1,000 are considered low, while rates from 40-50 births per 1,000 are considered high.

There are problems associated with both extremes; high birth rates may stress government welfare and family programs. Additional problems faced by a country with a high birth rate include educating a growing number of children, creating jobs for these children when they enter the workforce, and dealing with the environmental impact of a large population. Low birth rates may stress the governments to provide adequate senior welfare systems or stress families who must support the elders themselves. There will be fewer children (and a working-age population) to support an aging population.

Afghanistan, as one the most rapid population growth, faces serious problem such as being unable to provide education, employments, maternal, infant health and etc. Some link this mindset to religion, culture and traditions but the main reasons are the social security demand and the low level of awareness in Afghanistan. In regard to social security demand, there is a kind of competition amongst family, especially in the rural areas, to have several sons and form stronger family; because small families are considered weak and easily aggressed by rural powerbrokers or rivals.

Those who have few sons, think that they are weaker than the families having several sons. Therefore, they endeavor to have the same number of sons and term it a big magnificence in the society. The women are victims of such unsound competitions. As a result, women are impelled to respect the demand and inevitably deliver several babies without observing birth space. The average birth rate per family in Afghanistan is 5.22 babies, but the topmost is 10 children. This trend has been continued from past up to now, without evaluation of its future ruinous affects in a family and society.

In addition to complicated pregnancies, inaccessibility to primary healthcare services, insufficient numbers of health workers, early marriages, insecurities, poverty and unemployment, the high birthrate is counted as major factor for children and maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan. According to a survey of the "Save the Children" about the children and mothers' situation in the world (investigated over 179 countries) Afghanistan ranked 152. According to this report, Afghanistan is a country where the life condition is not promising for women and children.

As per the survey report of the World Health Organization, still Afghanistan kept the highest record of child and mater-

nal mortality rate in the region due to lack of accessibility to required healthcare services and other factors. According to the figures released by the ministry of public health, as many as 1,600 mothers died in every 100,000 while giving birth to a baby or as result of pregnancy-related problems.

The majority of young mothers lost their lives during pregnancies, because they give birth before age of 18. These category girls always have been victim of violence and ignorance. They are compelled to marry for money or given as Bad (to resolve a tribal conflict).

Repeated pregnancies without adequate space between births not only endanger life of mother and baby, but also deprive these women of enjoying motherhood in its true sense. Women burdened by large families and battling various illnesses in their productive years fail to realize and harness their potential and are unable to raise their children in a healthy environment. Whereas, Afghanistan has the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world also faces the challenge of population explosion. So far there is no exact figure about its population on the hand. Family analysts believe that lack of family planning methods will result that Afghanistan would have uncontrolled population in the next 50 years.

However, the numbers of midwives have been increasing in the country but not enough to reduce the maternal mortality rate yet. Comparing to the past, Maternal mortality in Afghanistan has been decreased up to five percent in recent years, but still we have long way to overcome this problem. Still, one in every five women in the country dies from a pregnancy-related cause during her life time. Insecurity, low level of awareness among women about healthcare service during pregnancy, lack of professional health workers in the remote districts, shortage of transportation and inappropriate traditions are the major challenges that can be pointed out.

To cope with challenges, the national policy makers, religious scholars and media can play major roles in dispelling wrong concepts of high birthrate in Afghanistan.

No religion says that a woman shall bear a child even if mother is mentally and physically unhealthy; as one of most important principle in Islam is not to impose any loss to any human being. So, when Health experts advise that women should observe three to five year spaces between each birth because multiple pregnancy affect health of the mother and newborn baby then it is on contrary to Islamic teaching if we disrespect the advice of experts. Family planning must be suggested as a first pillar of safe motherhood and doctors should undertake major responsibility to educate and encourage women, especially those who are admitted for a delivery, to use contraceptives. Finally, if we cannot find ways to lower the birth rate, the war, famine, pestilence will find us to increase the death rate which is more unpleasant!

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Education Innovation in the Middle East

By Gordon Brown

Supporting the millions of newly displaced people of the Middle East demands resources far beyond the capacity of the United Nations, and is a continuous humanitarian-aid challenge for companies, foundations, and public-sector donors. While UN peacekeepers are financed by a system of "assessed contributions," humanitarian aid depends on voluntary donations. Education, which is prioritized below basic survival needs like food and shelter, all too often gets left behind.

This failure is far more dangerous than it might seem at first glance. In fact, we now confront an education crisis that threatens to leave a lost generation of young people without any hope for a better future. The majority of Syria's six million displaced children remain out of school, while around 250,000 young people miss out on a college education. In war-torn Yemen and Iraq, millions more children are also missing out on school. Some may go through all their school-age years without ever entering a classroom.

But thanks to the Platform for Education in Emergencies Response, charities, philanthropists, and foundations can unite to help refugee students find higher-education opportunities, and to provide safe havens for lecturers and professors persecuted by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. PEER will connect college-ready Syrian refugees with refugee-ready colleges, and it will eventually be a web-based higher-education conduit for displaced students at all grade levels worldwide.

PEER is being supported by the Institute of International Education and the Catalyst Foundation for Universal Education, an education charity founded by former New York University President John Sexton. Beyond PEER, the Catalyst Foundation is also looking at projects to improve school auditing, spur social-impact investing in the education sector, and introduce curricula to encourage inter-faith coexistence in the Middle East and worldwide.

Schools are the first places where we can promote inclusive citizenship in Middle Eastern countries. With this in mind, the Catalyst Foundation is assessing pilot civic-education projects in the region - as well as in Eastern Europe, Africa, and the United States - to determine how school curricula can best cultivate inter-faith understanding.

A large generation of young people growing up in the Middle East and North Africa - soon to number 200 million - would be well served by an educational model that fosters cultural coexistence, especially during a time when certain politicians in the West deny that coexistence is possible. A model curriculum need not be limited to teaching the Golden Rule or making

optimistic appeals to universal religious axioms. It should also support courses that teach pupils that diversity is a strength and a public good for their societies. That is what the Catalyst Foundation hopes to do.

The proposal is to work with some half-dozen pilot schools, including a secondary school in the United Arab Emirates, high schools in the US and Europe, and a secondary school in Lebanon that is taking in Syrian refugee students. Lebanon is a particularly important participant in this project. Despite its long history of political, social, and religious divisions, all nine-year-old pupils are introduced to a school curriculum that emphasizes to all children - whether Shia, Sunni, or Christian - the worth and dignity of all faiths and the common ground between them. The Lebanese model is a good starting point for developing a framework that can be used worldwide. The Catalyst Foundation's curriculum is likely to include universal themes to prompt youths from very different national, religious, and cultural backgrounds to interact with one another, online or in person, by sharing their own insights and experiences. The goal is to foster cultural and religious understanding and dialogue among young people at a critical stage of their education, with the hope that they will grow up to become their countries' and communities' leaders.

Indeed, reformers have many opportunities to create new virtuous cycles across the Middle East's education sectors, and they should take a lesson from Sir Ronald Cohen's pioneering work in social-impact investing, and social enterprise as a whole. Education-sector social entrepreneurs now have more financing tools at their disposal than ever before - from venture capital to targeted-investment funds and other new asset classes - and they can play an important role in bringing the Middle East's classrooms into the twenty-first century.

Too many past ideas that have emerged from the nonprofit sector have stalled, owing to a lack of finance. The Catalyst Foundation aims to provide seed capital for education start-ups and to help them scale up successful programs.

For anyone who cares about education in the Middle East, our task is clear: to furnish millions of poor and vulnerable young people with the support they need to transform and improve their lives through learning. As the Catalyst Foundation intends to show, a little social enterprise can go a long way. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. He chairs the Advisory Board of the Catalyst Foundation.

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