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

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Managing Population Growth

There is no short cut to or any spontaneous method to decrease the number of people in a particular community and adjust them with the available sources and resources of the country. On the other hand, however, it requires a long-term planning with an effective and an efficient organization on the country level to make the people conscious about the rapid growth of population and to change their old values about the family and marriage. In the western countries and in some of the neighboring countries such organized programs like family planning are going on for better planning of population and resources. According to the prevailing conditions, family planning is the only remedy which can help people as well as the government to lead a prosperous and richer life in better ways.

The concept of family planning is not clear for a layman. Family planning does not imply the absence of children or sterilization, but it is only a low rate or reproduction and nothing unnatural or inhuman. Taking into consideration the prevailing deteriorating conditions of the country and masses as a whole, family planning can be one of the main solutions. Family planning can be an effective measure to check the rapid growth of population and provide a happy life both for the parents and children. Family planning is nothing but planned parenthood, i.e., reproduction of the children with a reasonable interval between the first and the second baby without affecting the health of the mother and socio-economic stability of the family unit. The number of children in the family should be according to its resources and it should not be too large to make proper socialization and education of the children difficult for the parents.

It is vital to understand that high population growth exerts pressure on national efforts for future economic growth and development and simultaneously diverts resources from productive uses to more consumption and creates greater demand for more and more civic amenities. Therefore, it is important to adopt a comprehensive national policy to deal with the situation of rapid growth of population so that both the nation and the individuals benefit from it.

Population planning is certainly beneficial to the families with low income, less literacy, already too many children and such other disturbing socio-economic characteristics. In all parts of the world including urban and rural people, economic reasons for adopting family planning seem to be more convincing in comparison to the other advantages in support of planning.

For example, the head of the rural family is faced with the problem of dividing up his small holding of land among his large number of children. While in a poor family, it is obvious that each new baby increases the burden on parents. Among those in somewhat higher economic circumstances, interest naturally develops for a better life and education for the children.

In cities, household appliances and other comforts are desired. All these facilities are difficult or impossible to attain for a large family except in families enjoying the highest economic status. The same kind of effects can be seen for the nation as a whole.

Then there are many health benefits as well that are attached to family planning. The women who are benefitting from this sort of planning tend to have better health. Enough time period during the two consecutive babies supports women in gaining enough energy. Then it should also be taken note of that there are higher chances of mortality in case of females during the child bearing period.

Repeated pregnancies break down the health of women, weaken them and result in their deaths. The women are more likely to die during child birth if they have more babies. And it is more dangerous if they are older in age and give birth to babies.

Moreover, frequent births deteriorate the health of the babies as well. Insufficient diet for the mother and babies effect the health of the babies to a large extent.

The health of the father is also affected negatively due to overwork as he struggles to support a large family. On the other hand, sick and unhealthy babies disturb the peace of mind of the fathers as well.

Therefore, it is essential that the families must adopt proper family planning so as to save their lives from different sorts of trouble and give birth and nourish the children who can be positive members of the society.

Few may suggest that family planning is not acceptable in Islam but they fail to understand that Islam is the most recent religion of the world. It not only takes care of the spiritual side of man but also guides him regarding his relations in the world with his fellow humans. Islam demands from Muslims to be wise and take actions that should assist them to spend easy and blissful lives, free of difficulties and sins.

The Unbreakable Deadlock of Peace Talks

By Hujjatullah Zia

The sordid acts of terrorist fighters have triggered a sense of consternation in Afghanistan. The flagrant violation of Afghans' fundamental rights on the grounds of their caste, color and creed is widespread. Warring parties, mainly the Taliban guerilla fighters, spilt the blood of civilians indiscriminately within the past decade and half. Afghan nation sustained heavy casualties and suffered excruciating pain as a result of unmitigated militancy. Despite counterinsurgency, there seems no light at the end of the tunnel. The emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has compounded the sufferings of the public. ISIL fighters intimidate people and stoke sectarianism through targeting ethnic minority groups. Women and children are highly prone to the venom spewed forth by this group. To put it succinctly, ISIL fighters pose more serious threat to Afghan nation and increase their vulnerability to violence and bloodshed.

Despite the fall of the Taliban's regime, national and international newspapers are replete with tragic news and doleful stories about Afghan people and the nascent democracy, in the post-Taliban Afghanistan, could not stymie the implacable militants from violating Afghans' rights and freedoms. To the chagrin of Afghan nation, the true spirit of democracy, which will necessarily lead to peace and prosperity, has been elusive. Similarly, the High Peace Council (HPC) that was established in 2010 failed to persuade the Taliban to come to negotiating table. With Mullah Haibatullah at the helm, the Taliban hold out against reconciliation process and will not desist their deadly offensives. Despite the fact that the Taliban are loath to hold amicable talks, Afghan officials seek persistently to nudge them to peace table.

Earlier, Gen John W. Nicholson, the top US commander in Afghanistan, claimed that the US was aware of Afghan Taliban leadership's presence in Peshawar and Quetta, adding that the military would continue to put pressure on Taliban sanctuaries inside and outside Afghanistan. Fractious Pakistan-US relations got further strained when US President Donald Trump unveiled his administration's policy on Afghanistan and South Asia. The policy lays special emphasis on kinetic operations to subdue Taliban militancy in Afghanistan, envisions greater role for India in Afghanistan and the overall regional security, and has particularly reprimanded Pakistan for not being a sincere partner in the fight against terrorism. Being dubious about a genuine intention of combating terrorism, Afghan-Pak officials continued the blame game; however, the mutual relations have started to thaw following the trip of Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa to Kabul. He promised that his country will combat terrorism alongside Afghanistan and support Afghan-led and Afghan-owned talks. Indeed, if Islamabad advocates the reconciliation process with bona fide intention, the efforts made for nudging the Taliban to peace table will bear the desired result. After all, the adverse effects of war suggest that negotiation will be the solution to the interminable conflict.

It is self-explanatory that Afghanistan and Pakistan are seriously afflicted by terrorism and the blame game and scurrilous remarks will only exacerbate the turbulent situation. On the other hand, the intensified attacks of warring factions reflect the monolithic networks of terrorists.

Now both the countries will have to thwart militants from shedding the blood of innocent individuals, mainly women and children, and frustrate their attempts to carry out large-scale offensives. If Kabul and Islamabad do not combat terrorism side by side, their efforts for counterinsurgency will be ineffectual.

The protracted war and nefarious acts of terror are no more tolerated by Afghan nation. With the US invasion in Afghanistan following the 9/11 episode, there was a lull in militancy, but the country soon reverted to instability as the Taliban were reorganized across the border. With the inexorable militancy, the war on terror was proved abortive and the combat mission of US-led NATO forces came to an end in 2014. The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, which was perhaps an egregious political error, the Taliban militants intensified their attacks inflicting heavy casualties upon Afghan combatants and non-combatants without a tinge of mercy. Since the consultative role of US soldiers failed to mitigate insurgency, Trump ordered the deployment of more troops in Afghanistan to resume military operations. Although Afghan government, along with its international allies, seeks to bring the Taliban to negotiating table, they do not succumb to call for peace talks – this will necessarily elicit military reaction.

Despite this fact, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Tadamichi Yamamoto says, "The UN supports all Afghans when we say that there can be no military solution to the conflict…. No one is winning and all of us, especially Afghan civilians, are losing as long as this war drags on."

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The Potential of a Creative City for Development

By Mohammad Amin Byani

In 2014, Bamyan joined UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) which invited 47 cities from 33 countries as part of the network in seven creative fields — crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts and music.

Bamyan is known for traditional handicrafts such as carpet weaving, sculpting and folk art, while the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of Bamyan was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2003. Bamyan was also recognized as the Cultural Capital of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for the year 2015.

The UCCN is a flagship program of UNESCO for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, and the New Urban Agenda, at the local level. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the international community in September 2015 highlights culture and creativity as key levers for sustainable urban development. The Network serves as an essential platform to contribute to the implementation and achievement of this international agenda.

By joining the Network, cities commit to collaborate and develop partnerships with a view to promoting creativity and cultural industries, to share best practices, to strengthen participation in cultural life, and to integrate culture in economic and social development strategies and plans. Joining UCCN does not necessarily mean that Bamyan has reached its final objective, i.e., the welfare for citizens, but this reflects the existence of potential for sustainable development. The instrumental role of cities in national development is no more a mystery for the public.

The blossom of a city at international level is a short cut for the development of other cities as well. States seek to reap the advantages of cities' economic competition at international level so as to enhance the condition of citizens' life and national economy.

Unluckily, one year after Bamyan's membership in the UCCN, there was no increase in development or regular budget. Moreover, Bamyan is one of the most deprived provinces of Afghanistan since sanitation is in an inappropriate condition, there is no access to clean drinking water, not enough infrastructure, no national project is under construction at provincial level, no access to electricity, half of the children at school age are deprived from getting education, and 40 percent of girls get married under the age of 18. There is no basic urban services in Bamyan, whereas the population of a creative city do not spend all their energy in satisfying their basic needs.

A creative city will pave the ground for citizens to learn skills and creative thoughts. Bamyan has large capacities for the country's development which is simply ignored. In fact, being a member of a global network is not a ceremonial issue. A city needs to meet the international criteria through sustainable struggles to keep its position safe as member of UCCN.

The increasing urbanization and the growth in the feature of cities have generated many problems. The Creative City seeks to reach urban development through exploiting culture and economy. That is to say, creative cities will build cities as the hotbed of creativity and culture and cities where the public activities bear enough variety, beauty, and attraction for promoting talents, innovation and ideas. Historically, cities have always relied on the creativity of their creative circles, such as economic agents, artists, students, etc. to generate wealth.

In fact, the vital and dynamic potential of a city by which it generates wealth, knowledge, arts, etc. is considered the creativity of citizens. Take, for example, the cities of Balkh, Bamyan, and Herat which were not only the hotbed of growth and prosperity of great individuals such as Rumi, Naser Khosrow, and Avicenna but also the richest cities of their time in the realm of culture and economy. A creative citizen needs a safe and prosperous atmosphere where s/he can nourish their talents.

If a society does not encourage citizens to grow their talents, creativity will not be actualized. Only the city will develop that has enough facilities and dynamic and various system regarding the growth of individuals' talent from all segments of society.

The government is supposed to play the role of a facilitator for better use of the capacities and resources of creative cities. Directing development projects, correcting and activating banking system, backing private sectors and NGOs, encouraging domestic and foreign investors, investing in technology and environment will be highly effective. Due to the international nature of creative cities, the role of government is very important in international relations and interactions. Government must provide tourists with services such as visa services, ticket services, travel advice, etc. By joining the Network, selected cities commit to joint collaboration of creative cities around the world as a way to enhance and promote creativity, share best cultural practices, and integrate culture in economic and social development plans.

The particular characteristics of creative cities will increase the number of tourists which will develop a country's economy. Hence, all citizens, mainly urban specialist and managers, will have to support the city to gain sustainable development.

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