

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



October 16, 2017

## Obstacles before Polio Campaign

Afghanistan is one of the three countries, alongside Pakistan and Nigeria, in the world where polio remains endemic. The number of reported cases has been reduced significantly in recent years in the wake of strong campaign against poliovirus. Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) seeks to immunize every single child in the country to minimize its risk. The decline in polio fills the air with a sense of hope and optimism, but there are obstacles which impede the campaign. Reports show that the cases of polio in Afghanistan dropped from 80 in 2011 to 37 in 2012. The downward trend continued with 8 cases confirmed, in eastern part of the country, during January - September 2013, compared with 26 within the same period in 2012. Last year, 13 polio cases were registered, down from 20 the year before and 28 in 2014. In 2015, in which polio reduced to a great extent, 40 per cent of cases were reported from Nangarhar province.

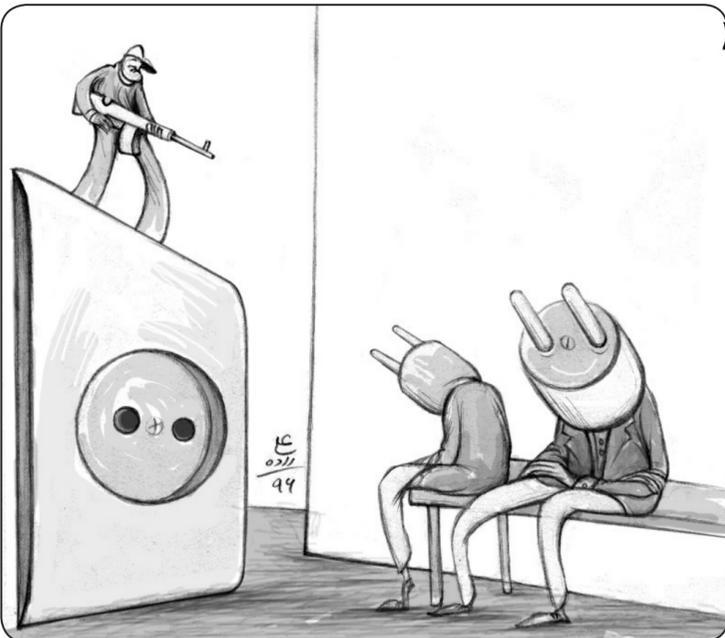
In the current year, three cases have been reported to date from Helmand, Kandahar and Kunduz provinces. The country-wide immunization campaigns began on January 30, targeting 5.6 million children. It is hoped that 2017 will be the end of poliovirus in Afghanistan with the lowest number expected in this year. World Health Organization (WHO), along with UNICEF and the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan, operate actively to eradicate the crippling disease of polio. "Thousands of frontline workers visit every house in the country during campaigns. That's not an easy task. Due to the hard work of these dedicated frontline workers, we are closer to polio eradication than ever," polio director for UNICEF in Afghanistan Melissa Corkum quoted as saying. The fruition of global campaigns against polio is highly promising. The international efforts decreased the number of endemic countries from 123 in 1988 to two in 2015, when Nigeria was delisted from polio-endemic countries. However, this country returned to the list when three cases of polio were found out in August 2016 in state of Borno - where the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram is active. Hence, the global campaigns within two decades and so decreased 123 polio-endemic countries to three, which is a tremendous progress.

The downward trend also continues in Afghanistan as fewer cases are reported annually. "We have seen significant progress in our polio eradication efforts over the past year. Most of Afghanistan is now polio-free, the circulation of the poliovirus is restricted to small areas in the eastern, southern and southeastern parts of the country and we have seen huge improvements in vaccination campaign quality," said director of the polio program at WHO Dr. Hemant Shukla adding that "Our focus is now on reaching every single child during every vaccination campaign to stop the transmission of polio." Despite the notable progress, there are also challenges in this regard. It is believed that two main obstacles hamper the anti-polio campaign in the country. First, a sense of mistrust filled the air in tribal belts - where the militants hold strong sway - as a result of the militants' negative propaganda. Parents lost their trust in health workers and showed little tendency in having their children vaccinated. Second, the escalated insurgency in restive provinces jeopardize the life of health workers. Warring factions, mainly the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Taliban, spill the blood of combatants and non-combatants indiscriminately. They have constantly violated humanitarian law through slaying women, children and health workers. In other words, although medical facilities, staffs and patients during war time are given immunity by the Laws of Armed Conflict - also known as International Humanitarian Law - the militants target them on purpose. Within past years, a number of polio workers, including women, have been targeted by armed gunmen in insecure provinces.

Health workers are threatened not only by terrorist groups but also by counter insurgency war. For instance, dozens of health workers and patients were killed in October 2015 as a result of the US military air attack on the Kunduz Trauma Center. Similarly, eight polio workers were killed while performing their duty in 2014. War is a serious threat to health workers and impedes their operations in this regard. Thanks to clerics for mitigating this problem through issuing decree in support of anti-polio campaign and endorsing polio vaccines. Last year, a National Islamic Advisory Group for Polio Eradication was founded to bridge the gap between parents and health workers which was created by the militant fighters. Consequently, almost 90 per cent of Afghans accepted how critical immunization was for their children and the improvement paved the ground for the implementation of 2016 polio-free in 99 per cent of Afghanistan's districts. The WHO hoped that eradication in the country was a "realistic goal".

Constitutionally, the state is committed to "provide free preventative healthcare and treatment of diseases as well as medical facilities to all citizens in accordance with the provisions of the law." It is believed that Afghan government will not be able to eradicate diseases, especially the polio, without international aids. No wonder, WHO and UNICEF play key role in the campaign against polio. Three decades of war has inflicted great harm on Afghanistan's political structure and economic infrastructures. That is to say, terrorism is still a challenging issue for the National Unity Government (NUG) and it has caused severe blow to the country's economic bases. Therefore, the country will not be able to continue this campaign without international supports. It is the government's responsibility to protect the life and liberty of all, especially health workers, so that the anti-polio campaign can bear the desired result. If militancy continues unabated and health workers lose their lives, Afghans will not have a polio-free country in near future.

Since polio is endemic in two neighboring countries Afghanistan and Pakistan, both the states have formed a cross border team so as to prevent from children's life-long paralysis and end this virus for good. The two polio endemic countries are on the horizon and poised to continue the campaign. However, insurgency remains a challenging issue hindering the campaign every once in a while and the vaccinators killed in Pakistan are believed to outnumber those targeted in Afghanistan. Now the question is that why Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan remain in the list of polio epidemics out of 123 countries despite the global campaigns against polio within more than two decades? It is most likely that terrorism is the only impediment to the anti-polio campaign. To put it succinctly, Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan spread misconception and target health workers. Clerics and health workers fulfilled their duties in the best possible way. The clergy persuaded parents to have their children vaccinated so as to safeguard them against disabilities and erased misconceptions spread by the Taliban. Health workers made great sacrifices to immunize children in any parts of the country. The only obstacle in this respect seems to be the escalated militancy. To have a polio-free Afghanistan, the state will have to provide a safe ground for health workers and make sure that every single child is vaccinated.



## Any Hope for Afghanistan's Future Economy?

By Mustafa Ahmadi

We are all eager to know about the future of Afghanistan's economy. The country's economy declined within the past decades, mainly during the civil unrests. Considering the recent relatively positive changes in the country's economic state which was mostly dependent on foreign aids, the economic stagnation was ended. Now the question to be answered by our economists and politicians is how one can imagine the economic future of Afghanistan particularly if the financial aids of developed countries are cut off?

Considering the current situation, you will simply think of exploiting natural resources and revenues that can be achieved from the relative advantages of the country, such as transit and also foreign direct investment that plays a crucial role. This view will be logical but not sufficient.

When economists want to categorize development resources at a macro level, they usually point to the following:

1. Increased labor supply
2. Increased investment
3. Increased human capital by training
4. Promoting the level of technology
5. Appropriate methods and proper allocation of factors.

To put it simply, investment and manpower are needed for production at a macro level; training will increase the productivity of manpower and promotion of technology level will increase the productivity of capital.

If one examines the development of Afghanistan's economy based on this theoretical framework since the beginning of the century, s/he will come to know that the bulk of the development within the past decade and half was due to the support of foreign investments and aids. The presence of young activists and the population pyramid of the country or the increase of years of education have not had much effect on this. As a result, one can claim that if we pass this route without reforming the educational system, we will encounter a high unemployment rate formed by educated individuals having academic qualifications - this is the very challenges being wrestled by developing countries. Considering this fact, it can be said that with the decrease of foreign capital and the cutoff of foreign aid, there can be no hope for the country's economic growth in the coming years.

With regard to this significant issue, the first point flashes through the minds of Afghan economists and politicians is to pave the ground for attracting foreign investment. Perhaps, they will be of the opinion to provide social security for achieving this objective since foreign investors can promote both the levels of investment and technology, which will reinforce economy. It is a positive step but not a sufficient one. What will be the more appropriate way for

economic development? Before answering to this question, let me point out an issue about America's economy. Everyone knows that America's economic performance was very distinct in 1990s. The origin of the US economic growth was a matter of question for economists. On the surface, it seemed that the Information Technology (IT) was the main reason behind economic growth, but the fact was otherwise. According to Robert Solow, an American economist and a Nobel laureate, computers were on the table but not in the process of production. It means that computer was not the reason behind the America's economic growth. So, what was the origin of economic growth for America in 1990s? Pertaining to this issue, Joseph Stiglitz says in one of his books that no one would thought of the deciding factor of US economic growth. The existence of chain stores and entrepreneurs looking for new and innovative ideas were the cause of economic development. He adds that these chain stores had adopted a way to distribute and trade, which led to a dramatic increase in productivity, put impact on the entire American economy.

The lesson to be taken for Afghanistan's economy is that sometimes the country should pay heed to the sources which never flash through the minds of officials or economists. For instance, establishing and supporting micro industries, especially in underprivileged and remote areas, will be highly crucial. On the other hand, we have to consider rural development - which is taken into account of many economic thinkers - to prevent from forced urbanization and the challenges posed by it. To support the country's industries, we need to establish online markets similar to many other countries. It can also be very useful to raise the speed of money circulation in the country.

To put it another way, over 80 percent of future jobs in the world will be formed by electronic instruments and internet. The more a country uses the cyber space the faster it will develop. Thus, much contact with the field of electronics will develop Afghanistan's economy, too.

Since this development is not necessarily dependent on natural resources or foreign aid, it is highly significant. The answer for the question that if one can be hopeful about the future economy of Afghanistan is positive. With our entrepreneurship, especially in internet and electronic fields, our country's economy can reduce many transaction costs and experience endogenous growth. In short, considering this view, reforming educational system, having a large strategy in the field of entrepreneurship, and promoting the culture of entrepreneurship in the country generate hope for the economic future of Afghanistan.

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## Nonstop Bleeding

By Hujjatullah Zia

A truck bomb blast shook Somalia's Capital Mogadishu on Sunday leaving hundreds of dead and wounded behind. This deadly incident reflects the strength of terrorist group of Al Shabab. The explosion made it the deadliest single attack ever in the Horn of Africa nation. However, Al Shabab has yet to claim the responsibility.

Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM) was forced out of the capital, Mogadishu, in August 2011 following an AU-led offensive, and left the vital port of Kismayo in September 2012. The AU-led ground offensive has been backed by US air strikes, which led to the killing of the group's leader Aden Hashi Ayro in 2008 and his successor Ahmed Abdi Godane. Al-Shabaab has been an al-Qaeda affiliate since then. It has been designated as a terrorist organization by a number of nations, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

In a joint video released in February 2012, former al-Shabab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane said he "pledged obedience" to al-Qaeda head Ayman al-Zawahiri. Meanwhile, some of the group's leaders quarreled with Al-Qaeda over the union, and quickly lost ground. The group has also been suspected of having links with Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram.

Al-Shabaab's troop strength was estimated at 7,000 to 9,000 militants in 2014. As of 2015, the group has retreated from the major cities, controlling a few rural areas.

Al-Shabab has imposed a strict version of Sharia in areas under its control, including stoning to death women accused of adultery and amputating the hands of thieves.

Though Somali Islamists did not originally use suicide bombing tactics, the foreign elements of al-Shabaab have been blamed for several suicide bombings. About the Sunday's suicide attack, Somalia's government has blamed the Al Qaeda-linked Al Shabab group for the attack calling it a "national disaster."

"They don't care about the lives of Somali people, mothers, fathers and children," Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi is cited as saying. "They have targeted the most populated area in Mogadishu, killing only civilians."

The United States Mission to Somalia condemned the bombings, calling them "cowardly attacks" that "reinvigorate the commitment of the United States to assist our Somali and African Union partners to combat the scourge of terrorism."

The blast occurred two days after the head of the United States Africa Command was in Mogadishu to meet with Somalia's president, and after the country's defense min-

ister and army chief resigned for undisclosed reasons.

In spite of the ISIL's defeat in Iraq and Syria, terrorist groups do seek to intensify their attacks in many parts of the world. ISIL's defeat is a serious threat to terrorist groups, therefore, they will not only intensify their attacks but also intend to empower themselves through propagating their ideology so as not to be fated to ISIL's destiny. It is further believed that members of ISIL group will join other militants in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Somalia etc.

Civilians bear the brunt of militancy in war-torn countries as a result of indiscriminate attacks of terrorist groups who show no mercy to non-combatants, mainly women and children. Many deadly scenarios will happen since terrorist groups are going to do everything in their power to inflict casualties upon nations so as to put pressure on states. The tragedies of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks are really indescribable.

The dogmatic ideologues are unlikely to hold negotiation with states. Take Afghanistan, for example. Although Afghan government, along with its international allies, call warring factions to come to the negotiating table but in return they response with gun. Currently, members of Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) participate in international conferences regarding peace process to bring the Taliban to peace table, the Taliban, however, send trucks of bomb to the country. Saturday night, Afghan police discovered and foiled a truck filled with explosive device. If this attempt was not frustrated, an explosion with the nature of Mogadishu attack would happen in capital Kabul. In short, Afghan government left no stone unturned to hold talks with warring factions, there is still no sign of peace.

When terrorist groups do not tend to lay their arms on the ground, persisting on talks will be proved abortive. The region will have to launch a joint military operation to eradicate terrorists and their whereabouts. If Iraq sought to negotiate with ISIL, there would be no success at all. Since cruelty runs in the blood of radical militants, their blood should be shed to end their harsh practices.

Viewing or simply imagining the burnt and bloody corpses of men, women, and children in Mogadishu and the victims groaning with pain, one's sense will go numb. It is the end of the worst-case scenario? Of course not. The blood-thirsty militants make no bone about shedding the blood of innocent people. Hence, showing mercy to militants is tantamount to cruelty to victims. They deserve the same what they do to others. Do you not think so?

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