

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



October 30, 2016

Afghan Saffron Ranked the Best, Again!

The production of saffron in Afghanistan has proved to be very productive and positive. It has brought a new ray of hope for Afghan economy and a substitute for poppy cultivation. Moreover, Afghan saffron has proved to be of high quality as well. In a recent report, the International Taste and Quality Institute in Brussels ranked Afghan saffron the best in the world in taste and quality amongst 300 samples from different countries.

Afghanistan acquired recognition on international scale for its saffron products in a very short period of time due to its unique qualities. In international market, Afghan saffron products compete with saffron products from Iran and Spain.

It seems that the efforts which were made earlier in the year so as to produce quality saffron have had some positive results. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) had distributed 280 tons of saffron bulbs to farmers for the reproduction of the crop, and it had also planned to issue licenses to a number of saffron processing companies. Moreover, the ministry was able to implement its major plans this year such as creating laboratories, training and issuing standard licenses for improving the production of saffron and extending its irrigation areas.

The majority of saffron producers in Afghanistan are ISO certified and export their products to Gulf countries, Europe, and the United States. The average price for Afghanistan's saffron is \$2,000/kg due to its quality and fragrance. The current amount of saffron product is around 5.3 tons, but the amount would be increased to 14 tons in the next five years based on the MALI plan.

President Ashraf Ghani affirmed the ratification of the strategy. The Office of the President further stated that it directed the relevant government bodies to implement a procedure under which the Afghan saffron packages are to be labeled with unique bar codes to prevent product fraud.

Ghani indicated that investors from the United Arab Emirates and China are interested in creating markets for Afghan saffron in their respective countries and he welcomes any efforts in this regard. Afghanistan can produce more saffron than any other saffron producing country if necessary support is provided to farmers.

In addition, it should also be noted that saffron can help us in some other ways as well. It can be used as an alternative crop to discourage poppy cultivation in the country that has been influencing our country in various ways. It has not only given us the evil of drug addiction that is taking the lives of many Afghan youth but has also strengthened the terrorism and terrorist networks as most of the Taliban terrorists receive their funding from poppy business.

It is important to understand that one of the best ways to control poppy is to motivate the farmers not to grow the poppy crops from the very beginning.

Motivating farmers and landlords to grow saffron as an alternative crop can be one of the best solutions as it is practicable and may bring the farmers and landlords profit as well.

Saffron has different advantages as compared to poppy cultivation and among them the most important one is that it does not bring harm to human life, it is legal and does not go against the teachings of Islam. It is one of those crops that have the capability to be grown in dry environment. Moreover, it does not need much irrigation as well. Simple irrigation two or three times a year would do the trick; in that sense, it is draught resistant. Poppy cultivation, in contrast, would require an extensive irrigation plan - six times a year.

Saffron has different uses and, in fact, makes life healthier. The common use of saffron can be found in adding flavor to dishes, preparing different types of medicines, hot drinks, appetizers and perfumes. Moreover, it has demand in the international market as well.

According to market studies, regionally the price of saffron is around USD 5,000; while the international price may even reach to USD 7,000. This shows that it is very lucrative and can be used as one of the basic exports of Afghanistan. It is also important to mention that the demand for saffron is very high both in regional and international markets.

What Afghan authorities and people require in this regard is proper implementations of their policies to change the scenario. It is true that the producers of drugs have stronghold in our country, but unshakable decision both by government authorities and Afghan people can defeat them.

If Afghan authorities are really interested in making saffron as the leading export of the country and controlling the menace of drugs and stopping it from financing terrorism and bringing sufferings and death to common Afghan people through addiction, it has to launch a comprehensive strategy for the growth, production and proper export of saffron.



Food effect: we are What we Eat

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

For thousands of years, people have believed that food could influence their health, personality and well-being. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, once said: "Let your food be your medicine, and your medicine be your food"; in medieval times, people started to take great interest in how certain foods affected their mood and temperament. Many medical culinary textbooks of the time described the relationship between food and mood. For example, quince, dates and elderberries were used as mood enhancers, lettuce and chicory as tranquilizers, and apples, pomegranates, beef and eggs as erotic stimulants. In recent times, we have seen immense progress in research, primarily short-term human trials and animal studies, showing how certain foods change brain structure, chemistry, and physiology thus affecting mood and performance. These studies suggest that foods directly influencing brain neurotransmitter systems have the greatest effects on mood, at least temporarily. In turn, mood can also influence our food choices and expectations on the effects of certain foods can influence our perception.

Scientifically, the relationship between food and brain is confirmed. For example the scarcity of nutrients such as iron and iodine can impair cognitive and motor development, and these effects are often irreversible. Iodine deficiency can lead to enlargement of the thyroid and irreparable mental retardation in infants and children whose mothers were iodine deficient during pregnancy.

Moreover, chlorine, folic acid, and zinc, to name just a few - have been linked specifically to early brain functioning. It has confirmed children who do not have enough to eat wind up with diminished capacity to understand and learn. quality of food and certain nutrients such as vitamins A, D, B12 and K2 are the most critical factors for the brain to form, to develop and to function properly, for good mental health and for nervous system to function normally, and deficiencies manifest as psychiatric disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive behavior, irrational anger, depression, manic depression, Alzheimer's and dementia.

Also there is relationship between food and mood; According to one study, insufficient amounts of thiamine or Vitamin B1 caused "introversion, inactivity, fatigue, decreased self-confidence and generally poorer mood" in participants. Improved thiamine status increases well-being, sociability, and overall energy levels. Thiamine is contained in foods such as cereal grains, yeast, potatoes, cauliflower, oranges, and eggs and can influence mood states.

In addition, Iron deficiency represents one of the most common nutritional problems in both developing and developed countries affecting over 2 billion people worldwide. Iron deficiency anemia can result in depressed mood, lethargy and problems with attention. A low iron status is most common among women, children, vegetarians, and people who fol-

low a diet. Iron deficiency also results in a decreased ability to exercise. Foods rich in iron include liver, vegetables such as broccoli, asparagus, and parsley, seafood, iron-fortified grains, greens, nuts, meat, and dried fruits. Also Studies have found that diets low in carbohydrates increased feelings of anger, depression, and tension and diets high in protein and low in carbohydrates increased anger. Diets high in carbohydrates have a generally uplifting effect on mood.

According to a study, female and male participants were asked to report how their eating patterns changed with emotions of anger, fear, sadness, and joy. When experiencing anger and joy, participants experienced increased hunger as compared to feelings of fear and sadness.

Anger increased comfort and impulsive eating, and joy increased eating for pleasure. It also found that people eat more less-healthy comfort foods when they are sad. Participants of watching a happy or a sad movie and were provided with buttered popcorn or seedless grapes throughout the movie. The group watching the upbeat movie consumed significantly more grapes and less popcorn than the group watching the sad movie. as well, when participants were provided with nutritional information, the sad people consumed less popcorn than the happy people and the happy people did not alter their consumption.

In short, we are those low quality foods that we eat and slowly affected over our personality, brain and health but we forgot the importance this matter. We forgot if we get stressed in the family, easily get impatient with neighbor or our children fail in example might be the direct reason of food causing health problem, mental disorder, and mental impairment. Almost 90% our food items are imported but there is no accurate system to ensure they impose no problem to our health.

For instance, we excessively use the lowest wheat flour while the wheat, especially the modern and the processed wheat, is being increasingly blamed for the onset of other health conditions, like obesity, heart disease, neurological impairment, dementia, cataracts, diabetes, arthritis and visceral fat accumulation. The modern flour is processed into 60% extraction, bleached white flour - the standard for most wheat products means that 40% of the original wheat grain is removed. So not only do we have an unhealthy, modified, and hybridized strain of wheat, we also receive the removed and degraded nutritional value. Unfortunately, the 40% that gets removed includes the bran and the germ of the wheat grain - its most nutrient-rich parts. In the process of making 60% extraction flour, over half of the vitamin B1, B2, B3, E, folic acid, calcium, phosphorus, zinc, copper, iron, and fiber are lost. Any processed foods with wheat are akin to poison for the body since they cause more health risks than benefits. The body does not recognize processed wheat as food.

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A Surge in Sectarianism

By Hujjattullah Zia

Sectarian violence is one of the most serious issues being practiced by the radical militants in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and people are killed on the grounds of their caste, creed and color. The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) is widely involved in stoking sectarianism. The ethnic minority groups fall victim to their violence which stems from fundamental ideology. Afghanistan is believed to be immune to sectarian violence before the emergence of the Islamic State group and this issue is the product of their harsh mentality and political plot.

After a decline in scale and casualties, Violence against sectarian minorities is once again resurging in Pakistan, Afghanistan. In the last two weeks, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) Al-Alami, an anti-Shia extremist outfit, has claimed responsibility for the murder of four Hazara Shia women in Quetta and the attack on an Imambargah in Karachi. During the same period, two deadly attacks of almost similar nature were plotted against Shia worshipers in the country, one in Kabul and the other in the northern Balkh province. Since 2014, sectarian terrorism, spearheaded by the Khurasan chapter of the Islamic State, has emerged as a new potent threat in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban insurgency.

There are operational linkages between anti-Shia outfits in Karachi, Balochistan, and those operating across the western border. According to reports, the IS-Khorasan assigned the killing of the Hazara women in Quetta to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) Karachi chapter, which then outsourced it to the Lj-al Alami in Balochistan.

The deadly attack on police academy in Quetta - which killed at least 60 people and wounded dozens more - was allegedly carried out by Al-Alimi faction of the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ). However, the militant IS group also, separately, claimed responsibility for the attack. Militants have been targeting security forces in the area for almost a decade. The college came under attack in the past in 2006 and 2008, with attackers firing rockets into the college playground. It covers about an acre of land located about 13 kilometers outside the main city of Quetta. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal database, Pakistan suffered a peak in sectarian violence between 2007 and 2013, which left 2,714 people dead in as many as 905 violent incidents. Since then, the sectarian attacks dropped sharply across Pakistan in 2014 and 2015. In these two years, the sectarian incidents and casualties came down to 144 and 484, respectively.

ISKP has, over the last year, claimed more than a dozen attacks in Afghanistan, too. Half of them were untraceable to

any actual incident and thus remain empty claims. Some were claimed by both the Taliban and ISKP, but with the latter often providing more convincing detail. One of the initial attacks was a small bomb which exploded outside the largest and oldest place of worship for Shias in Kabul in the lead-up to Ashura in 2015. One person was killed and several wounded in the blast in Chandawal, in the centre of the capital. The bulk of ISKP's attacks in Kabul, however, have taken place since summer 2016. Several of these attacks are noteworthy for their deadliness, political implications or complexity.

In recent decades, compared to most conflicts in the Muslim world, Afghanistan has stood out for the absence of such fratricide. ISKP, during the short period since its emergence, has, however, showed no hesitation in stepping into this un-mined area. While the Ashura and July 2016 attacks in Kabul are the most remarkable examples of sectarian violence by ISKP, the overall sectarian trend that is emerging since the group's advent has been much wider.

By standing prominently for a sectarian cause, ISKP is trying to cater to all those fanatics who have long missed a militant organization with this explicit aim. This is, potentially, an untapped 'market'. If ISKP manages to attract such extremists, it could considerably boost its membership and support base, especially among the educated urban youths.

Sowing the seeds of sectarianism in Afghanistan is highly dangerous and will lead to horrible consequence since urban teenagers show inclination towards it. It is believed that during the Taliban's regime, their infectious mindsets were implanted within urban cultures and they spew forth the venom of radicalism. Hence, as there is the potential of radicalization among the dregs of society, the ISKP seeks to actuate it not only through preaching their ideology but also through financial supports. Stoking sectarianism was also practiced by former kings in Afghanistan. The policy of "divide and govern" will work well in the frame of fueling sectarian emotions. Employing the naïve urban youths under the aegis of fundamental narrative of religious texts will be hardly abortive.

It is believed that madrasahs, be it in Pakistan or Afghanistan, are the hotbed of radical mindsets and must be under the cautious watch of Afghan-Pak officials. In a nutshell, many guerrilla fighters come from madrasahs - the fighters are mostly from the poverty-stricken areas. The counter-insurgency will come to fruition if the root of radicalism be eliminated. The ISKP, which has turned out highly dangerous and dispose of the individuals for their certain beliefs and color, will have to be combated strongly and bilaterally.

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