

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



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Efforts to Discourage Female Education

The activities of the religious fundamentalists to discourage education of the girls in Afghanistan continue as around 70 other schoolgirls have been poisoned in western Herat province. In about a couple of weeks more than 400 school girls have been poisoned in the province.

According to the reports around 70 girls were poisoned on Monday, September 07, 2015, in Naveen Safli School in Injil district at around 8am. Previously, 190 schoolgirls were poisoned at the Habib Al-Mustafa School in the same district and another 160 were poisoned in Abdul Ali Tokhi School in Herat City.

This is really alarming and shows the ill intentions of the religious fundamentalists, mostly Taliban. With their activities they want to discourage female education as much as possible, which has had considerable development after the downfall of Taliban. It is really imperative to have a check on the impunity with which they target the female schools and the continuation of such activities. There are fears that a wave of such attacks may start throughout the country and it would be really difficult to control the situation.

Afghanistan is one of the countries that are highly influenced by such people who aim to block all the ways to improvement and modernization. Blinded by religious extremism and outdated tribal values, they are always ready to oppose any sort of efforts that are devoted to spread education to the people of Afghanistan, as they know that the modern education that has been spread in the country to a certain level may encourage evolution and modern changes. In particular, they are against the modern education for the females. The destiny-makers of this society know that if the girls are given modern education, they may question about their roles in rights. They may question the prejudiced rules and regulations. They may challenge the religious dogmas and in due course challenge the Mullahs and the illiterate tribal leaders. They may change the scenario and that is what the makers of the society do not want them to do. They want them to be passive and compliant, as in such state they would be easier to tackle and ruled over.

Taliban are among the same kind of people. They have been trying to eliminate all the efforts that are targeted at spreading girls' education in Afghanistan. They, still, live in the era that is ancient and obsolete, but they are not capable of realizing this fact. They, as a matter of fact, strive to obstruct the rising sun, which is impossible, as sun has to rise some day and show its light to the people. And, the people have to follow the light of the sun as walking in dark would never help them and show them their destination.

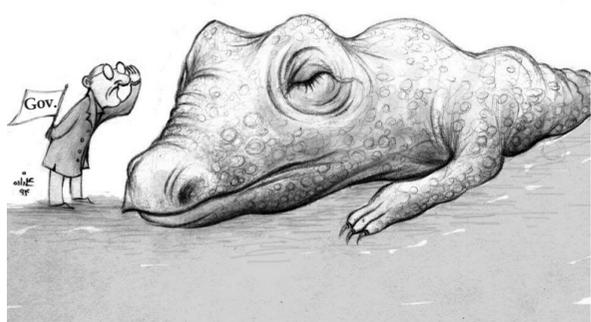
There have been incidents when they have bombed schools, killed the guiltless students and teachers, poisoned the students and even thrown acid on the faces of innocents girls who go to school. Last couple of years witnessed so many incidents wherein many innocent school girls were poisoned in mysterious ways that even took the lives of some of them.

Earlier, as well, when such incidents took place, the officials were not able to find out the actual reason. There were only a couple of cases when they were able to reach close to actual fact; otherwise, mostly they remained clueless.

It is required from the government, especially security forces, to investigate these sorts of incidents and must make efforts to introduce concrete measures to check the situation.

Reproving the incident alone would not be adequate to dispirit such ruthless activities and would in the long run deprive the people of Afghanistan from better opportunities to get education. It is important that the government must indoctrinate within our people the worth and importance of modern education and must encourage it as much as possible. Modern education is essential for Afghan society if it has to change in true sense. Education is one of the factors responsible for making these changes possible. It is education that ensures smooth evolution of the society and welcomes the new ideas and processes. The nations of the world that have given value to modern education and have made efforts to develop their education systems on the basis of modern and scientific systems have been able to earn astonishing growth and reputation. Simultaneously they have assimilated innumerable amenities of life for their people and have made them capable of living their lives with poise and decency.

Same is the case with the condition and position of women; they can only change when they are given modern education. Afghan government needs to keep this thing in mind that they have to neutralize all the efforts that are exerted to nullify the gains regarding modern education, especially of the girls. Providing a sustainable and modern education system to the children of Afghanistan without any discrimination of gender will be the greatest of the services to Afghanistan.



Flames of Sectarian Violence Burn the Civilians

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State group in Afghanistan, unknown gunmen have ushered in fomenting sectarianism through murdering civilians – mainly from an ethnic minority. The sporadic abduction and killing of the travelers and bombastic rumors about the presence of the Islamic State (IS) have spread a sense of fear and disappointment in the air. Similarly, the Taliban insurgents have widened their sphere of influence in restive parts of the country and seek to muddy the waters more than ever before.

Reports say that unknown armed men have gunned down 13 civilians – who were traveling in passenger bus – in northern Balkh province on Saturday. The report was confirmed by Abdul Raziq Qaderi, Deputy Police Chief of Balkh province. The responsibility is yet to be claimed.

This comes as masked gunmen seized 31 passengers from a bus in the southern Afghan province of Zabul in late February as they were returning from Iran – from which 19 were released on May 11, 2015 however the whereabouts of the rest are still a mystery.

The abduction or killing of the ethnic minority group is systematized by a particular group for two major reasons behind. Firstly, the perpetrators intend to foment sectarian violence and fuel racial tensions among the ethnic groups. The emergence of sectarian violence among the nation will pave the way for further turbulence and enable the militants to gain their sinister aim. Secondly, they seek to create political turmoil and undermine the democratic infrastructures, which are to be taking root, in the country. Undeniably, elections and peaceful transition of power, the establishment of constitution, etc. are seeds of democracy sowed in Afghanistan to ensure freedom, peace and human rights in near future. Unsurprisingly, the nation's enemies are not patient enough to see the seed of democracy will grow into a robust tree and bear fruit, at least for our next generation. Their sinister aim is to impose the current war and bloodshed on our future generation too and fill their minds and hearts with a sense of revenge and cynicism.

The Taliban insurgents have also extended their sphere of influence and make heavy inroads into the country. They are growing stronger in the north and east holding more territory than ever before and mounting ferocious attacks in Kabul in which some 100 people have been killed in the past few weeks. Talks between Afghanistan and the Taliban and Pakistan are at an impasse following the recent announcement of the death of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar in 2013. Afghan criticism of

Pakistan for allegedly not reining in the Taliban is increasing daily. President Ashraf Ghani's approval rating has fallen from 50 percentage points to 38, while his partner in power Abdullah Abdullah's ratings are even lower, according to Tolo news. The government is paralyzed, apparently incapable of still filling empty slots in the cabinet, while key projects such as identity cards and electoral reforms are on hold and mired in controversy. Afghanistan's army is heroically struggling to contain the Taliban and hanging on to district capitals but is incapable of going on the offensive or regaining lost territory. The casualty rates are the worst ever and according to US officers, "unsustainable". The remaining US and NATO forces are expected to leave at the end of the year.

According to the New York Times, about 4,100 Afghan soldiers and police have been killed and another 7,800 wounded in the first six months of this year. That is 50% more than the same period last year.

The country's best hope in years – opening talks with the Taliban – has been stymied by the leaking of Mullah Omar's death. Some Taliban leaders tried to keep it secret for unknown reasons until the news broke after the first meeting between the Taliban and Afghan officials in Pakistan on 7 July. "One popular solution being hotly debated by Afghan intellectuals and politicians is for President Ghani to call an emergency Loya Jirga that would choose an interim government and president for a period of no more than a few months. Such a grand assembly would then initiate debate and pass constitutional and electoral reforms, as President Ghani and Mr. Abdullah had promised to do when they were installed as joint power holders in the national unity government."

Overall, the fragile political structure, insecurity and civilian casualties have frustrated the people. To their unmitigated chagrin, the persisting insurgencies and heavy attacks carried by the Taliban militants lead to higher death toll. After all, sectarian violence, which is on the verge of taking root in the country, is a highly threatening issue to be combated. If this trend – i.e. targeting an ethnic minority – continues, this will have an adverse effect on national unity and change into a bone of contention. It is believed that those who operate under the aegis of IS are behind murdering ethnic minority group. Be it IS or the Taliban militants, the government has to deal this issue militarily and provide peace and security for the citizens irrespective of their color, race, sect, gender etc. I emphasize that if Afghan officials do not curb sectarian violence, it will lead to greater challenges and trigger disunity among the nation. Serious steps are to be taken in this regard and the perpetrators will have to be brought into justice.

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Pacific Approach to Deal with the Dual Burden of TB-Diabetes

By Shobha Shukla

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan

Many of the 22 countries that comprise the Pacific Islands region have very high rates of type-2 diabetes (upto 37% prevalence in adults) and high rates of TB as well (upto 343 cases per 100000). In fact 7 of the world's top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of diabetes are in the Pacific Islands region: Tokelau, Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Cook Island, Nauru, Micronesia and Kiribati. Similarly, some countries also have very high TB rates. It is no wonder then that the problem of TB-diabetes co-morbidity afflicts this region as well.

During the ongoing 5th Asia Pacific Region Conference on Lung Health of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) in Sydney, Dr Richard Brostrom, State TB Branch Chief and Pacific Regional Medical Officer, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), spoke to CNS about his team's innovative and integrated approach to deal with this dual burden.

One Patient With Two Diseases!

According to Brostrom, "TB-diabetes co-morbidity is a global problem, but we in the Pacific region, see it as a local problem and approach it from the patient's perspective - it is about one patient with two diseases. Rather than divide the care, we try to integrate the care for each patient. Once we started doing a blood glucose test for every adult TB patient the number of TB patients with diabetes became very high. It is known now that 60% of the adult Pacific islanders with TB also have diabetes. And many of them are unaware of their diabetes status when they first come to a TB clinic."

So this is a unique region where a majority of patients with active TB also have diabetes. "This does not give us the luxury of building a special programme to deal with this problem but instead integrate TB and diabetes care. We not only check for diabetes in all our TB patients but also try to check for TB in diabetes clinics. This serves two purposes - find TB cases that are in a diabetes clinic and get an opportunity for prevention of TB. People with diabetes are a high-risk group for TB and so it makes sense to test them for latent TB infection and then give them preventive medicine so that they do not reach active TB stage. There is a list of special interventions for our clinicians to remind them that people with diabetes may have special needs - medication doses might have to be adjusted for those TB-diabetes patients who have kidney problem; we also have to look for drug resistance, as more and more drug resistance is associated with diabetes patients. Then again, we know that in people with diabetes, TB relapse rates are 3-4 times higher than in TB patients without diabetes. So in the Pacific, we very often treat TB patients with diabetes for 9 months, instead of the normal 6 months, to prevent relapse," said Dr Brostrom.

Dr Brostrom and his team have trained their TB clinic staff to manage diabetes, in order to maximize quality of care and improve TB treatment outcomes. The DOIS providers, community workers and nurses have been given basic diabetes education. With help from Australian Respiratory Council a flipchart of diabetes education has been developed to go along with TB education. A TB healthcare provider makes 100 home visits of a TB patient during his/her TB treatment period. It is during these regular face-to-face interactions that the patients are told on how to manage their diabetes, along with ensuring that they are swallowing their TB drugs.

"This has really helped in reducing the patients' glucose levels. As long as they are under TB treatment, we provide them with long lasting information for keeping their diabetes under control. This repeated teaching is done not only of the patients, but also of their family members. Messages are simple and repeated. Our TB nurses do not talk about diabetes medication, but they are competent to advice about the benefits of optimum food portion sizes, substituting carbohydrates with vegetables, and exercising. A typical TB patient with diabetes has very little understanding about diabetes and its risk factors. So this education really helps. When the patients get a chance to sit down with a nurse in their living room or kitchen, who not only gives them their TB medicine but talks about their diabetes too, it makes the whole issue more humane," feels Dr Brostrom. It is perhaps because of this reason that, unlike the bigger countries, in the Pacific region, often the problem of adherence is less acute. Also as the population is small - most islands have 30,000-40,000 inhabitants - it becomes difficult for TB patients to escape the DOIS providers who do a good job of follow up. No wonder treatment success rates are as high as 90%-95% in some places, as shared by Dr Brostrom. "We do not aim to change the diabetes incidence through a TB programme. But we do want to address how diabetes affects TB patients in not only the Pacific but also in other parts of the world," he said. Is Tb-Stigma A Barrier For Tb Testing In Diabetes Clinics?

Ms Kerri Viney, Research Fellow at Australian National University and a TB Consultant shared similar thoughts with Citizen News Service (CNS): "Diabetes has been slowly increasing in this region, as across the world, to the point that it has become a major health problem. We have been talking about the TB-diabetes co-morbidity problem close to about 10 years, but it was only in 2008-2009 that we realized its seriousness. Bidirectional screening is part of the collaborative framework for TB-diabetes care and many countries like Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and Micronesia are screening TB patients for diabetes. But the harder part is getting diabetes patients screened for TB. This could partly be due to the stigma attached with TB and also because screening for diabetes can be done easily in a TB clinic, but to test for TB is more complex".

Common Risk Factors: Obesity And Tobacco!

According to Dr Brostrom obesity and tobacco are common risk factors for TB and diabetes. Other risk factors would include an unhealthy diet. "This is sort of a suicidal risk factor at this point of time with food insecurity, poverty, poor food choices that are available. It is expensive to eat well and diabetes has now become a disease of the poor because of food insecurity," he said. Meanwhile, Kerri feels that it is necessary to scale up TB-diabetes collaborative care and not just bidirectional screening. There is need for more data on TB prevalence in patients with diabetes and also more information about the dynamics of the two diseases. She thinks that as it might be an uphill task to screen all diabetes patients for TB, perhaps one may screen those with uncontrolled blood sugar or those on insulin. Another point to ponder upon is about TB prevention in people with diabetes.

Dr Brostrom strongly feels that having successfully integrated TB-diabetes care and control, the next step forward would be to integrate tobacco control with the DOIS programme. But this would not be easy. He cautions that it would be a much tougher job to get someone quit smoking or change his or her dietary habits as compared to completing TB treatment. Yet, it is high time that tobacco control becomes an important component of the collaborative efforts to tackle TB and diabetes.

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