

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



September 10, 2016

8th September - International Literacy Day

8th September is celebrated as International Literacy Day in most of the countries of the world in order to underline the worth of literacy and accentuate the efforts that are made for the purpose of eradicating illiteracy and spreading the light of education.

The day was first proclaimed by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on November 17, 1965 and this day was first celebrated in 1966. The basic motive of the day is to stress the importance of literacy to individuals, communities and societies. On this day, UNESCO reminds the international community of the status of literacy and adult learning globally.

It is now an incontrovertible fact that literacy plays a pivotal role in the development of a society. Thinking of development and progress without a high literacy rate is nothing more than a daydream. The developed nations of the world have reached to where they are by dint of education and focusing on improving their literacy rate. The underdeveloped and the developing nations need to do the same so as to enable themselves to follow a path to prosperity.

Our country Afghanistan, which is highly influenced by illiteracy and ignorance needs to hold the hand of education tightly if it really wants to change its destiny. Poverty is widespread in the country; unemployment is rampant; crimes and corruption are the order of the day; and insecurity, terrorism and religious extremism threaten the lives of the people. In such a scenario it is only literacy that can play some role in bringing about positive changes. Otherwise, the country would have to keep on suffering from these hardships forever.

Though it is difficult to find direct links between literacy and the eradication of these problems, there are indirect and long-term connections. And for the proof it is better to examine the societies that have been able to solve many of their social, economic and political issues. Our examination would clearly depict that these are the societies that have valued literacy and made tangible progress in that regard. Their experiences taught them to abhor ignorance and hold the hands of literacy for a journey towards development. Definitely, they have strived consistently for what they have achieved. They have opened their eyes to the realities of life and many of them have in fact understood the fact that they have the right to be educated and their governments have the responsibility to provide them the same. We need to follow their footprints in this regard. Unfortunately, due to the prevailing ignorance most of the people in the country do not have even an imaginative idea of a prosperous society, wherein all the citizens have their due rights. They even do not know that there are certain countries in the world that have most of the facilities of life and they have developed so much that now they have reached to skies to discover them. The situation here in our country is so that if a clergy announces that man can never reach to the skies and the claims of the developed countries of the world are nothing more than white lies, they will definitely believe him with respect and complete submission.

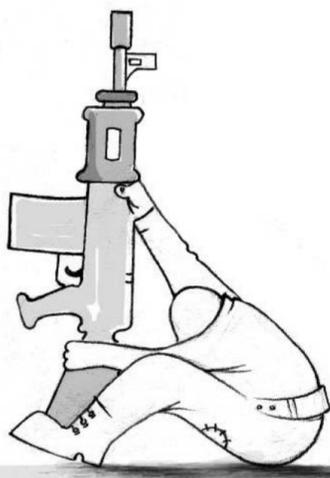
Our people are alien to the industrial and scientific developments and on most of the cases they treat them with hypocrisy. There are many among us who basically take advantage of the scientific inventions and discoveries almost on daily basis but never hesitate to declare them incorrect and false. If they had the potential they would definitely take our society back to the Dark Ages.

Unfortunately, there are many so-called intellectuals in our society as well who spend their time and energy in favoring the conservative and fundamentalist ideas and strive to prove them right.

Because of the issues and people mentioned above our society has become confused. One of the most dominating characters of our society is that it has made the people conservative and they have started praising their past more than their present. They have started hating each other instead of disseminating the golden feelings of love and brotherhood.

Nevertheless, the time has arrived when they should realize that they have to be vigilant and understand that they are being fooled. Their thoughts are being controlled and their emotions are being betrayed. They are being exploited in the name of religion and history. Now, they have to realize that their responsibilities are to declare clearly that they are no more ready to be fooled and to be utilized by others.

Their rights are to announce their hatred for ignorance, poverty, conservative ideas, slavish thinking and growing hypocrisy. And, the need to start with a movement against illiteracy and ignorance. They should say no to the darkness and try to follow the light as it is the only way that they can live their life with prosperity and dignity; and World Literacy Day is the day when they should further strengthen their commitments and accelerate their actions.



The Continuation of Escalated Insurgency

By Hujjatullah Zia

The recent surge in militancy and series of terrorist attacks demonstrate the radical character of Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada. Succeeding Akhtar Mansour - who was killed in US drone strike in Balochistan about four months back - Haibatullah intensified his offensives in Afghanistan and inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan combatants and non-combatants alike. He, who has changed into reclusive leader the same as Mullah Omar, orchestrates bloody scenario behind the smoke screen and perhaps used as a pawn in political games. Afghan nation bleeds incessantly as a result of the escalated militancy and bear the brunt of the terrorist attacks carried out by the Taliban fighters. Of late, the heart of Kabul City was shaken with suicide bombings which filled the air with a sense of fear and disappointment. This week, the terrorist attacks left at least 40 people dead and dozens wounded in Kabul.

The statistics from a comparative study of the US State Department's country reports on terrorism for 2014 and 2015 show that the number of last year's total attacks in Afghanistan increased by 127pc between February (88 attacks) and May (200). The US study also shows several significant global trends. The total number of terrorist attacks in 2015 decreased by 13pc around the globe and total deaths due to terrorist attacks decreased by 14pc, compared to 2014. "This was largely due to fewer attacks and deaths in Pakistan, Iraq and Nigeria. This represents the first decline in total terrorist attacks and deaths worldwide since 2012," the State Department noted. In several countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, the Philippines, Syria and Turkey, terrorist attacks and total deaths increased in 2015. Although terrorist attacks took place in 92 countries in 2015, more than 55pc of all attacks took place in five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nigeria. And 74pc of all deaths due to terrorist attacks took place in five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Syria and Pakistan.

The geographic reach of attacks by IS and its affiliates expanded as several existing terrorist groups pledged allegiance to IS. In addition to Boko Haram in West Africa, the most active of these IS branches were located in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

In 2015, a total of 11,774 terrorist attacks occurred worldwide, resulting in more than 28,300 total deaths and more than 35,300 people injured. In addition, more than 12,100 people were kidnapped or taken hostage.

With the appointment of Haibatullah as Akhtar's successor, militancy has increased on a large scale in Afghanistan and civilian casualties make hackneyed headlines on national and international newspapers. In other words, Afghan nation, who dreamed of embracing democracy in a peaceful atmosphere in post-Tali-

ban Afghanistan, has been changed into sacrificial lamb and the hemorrhage never stops. The insurgents have always been involved in indiscriminate killings and show no iota of mercy to civilians, including women and children.

After all, Haibatullah's men have ushered in targeting educational centers and abducting instructors. The suicide attack on the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) on August 24, 2016 - which reportedly led to the death of 13 individuals, seven of them students, and wounded many others - reveals this ugly fact. The attack came just two and a half weeks after two AUAF faculty members - one American and one Australian - were abducted by armed gunmen. Moreover, In January 2014, two AUAF employees, a student affairs specialist and a political science professor, were among 21 killed in a Taliban attack on a Kabul restaurant.

Needless to say, the Taliban's ideology is in conflict with modern knowledge; however, they only banned the girls' schooling and razed their schools to the ground, mainly during their regime. The Taliban's radical leader extends the realm of his offensive and targets teachers and students and universities - this is the worst incident which creates fear and anxiety for instructors and as well as students.

The unmitigated militancy has resulted in mistrust between state and nation and harsh rhetoric is expressed in cyber space against the National Unity Government (NUG), mainly after suicide attacks and the words of condemnation stated by the NUG's heads which can never alleviate the pain and anguish of the victims' families. The level of dissatisfaction regarding the NUG is really high since the country is wrestling not only with insecurity but also economic, social and many other challenges and a large number of Afghan youths took refuge to foreign countries to get rid of such crises.

To gain the trust of the public, the government will have to tackle the issues and protect citizens' rights and freedom. How long should Afghan nation suffer from insecurity without any effective strategies from the government?

Following this week's attacks, The US on Tuesday assured the country of its "unwavering" support in the fight against terrorism. "The United States remains unwavering in our support for the people and government of Afghanistan," US National Security Spokesperson Ned Price is cited as saying.

He also condemned the attack "in the strongest terms". The White House official said the United States would continue to work with the Afghan government to build a more secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan. The country, indeed, needs the support of foreign countries and international community and it is not to be left in the lurch.

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What is Critical Thinking?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Unfortunately, a large number of people in Afghanistan are imitators and thoughts consumers. They are easily incensed, misled and rarely propelled to an accurate deduction. For this reason, critical thinking, also called critical analysis, can be prescribed as an intellectual tool to guide the young generation how to reach a deep understanding and seeking logical solutions for social and personal issues. Critical thinking is not a matter of accumulating a lot of information. A person with a good memory and who knows a lot of facts is not necessarily a good at critical thinking. A critical thinker is good problem solver; he is able to deduce consequences from what he knows, and how to make use of information and seek relevant sources of information to solve a problem. Critical thinkers do not concentrate on the problems; instead they focus on the contexts because focusing of problems is not leading to solutions - it leads to blaming one and others and create more hatred. Critical thinking should not be confused with being argumentative or being critical of other people. Although its skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can also play an important role in cooperative reasoning and constructive tasks. Critical thinking can help us acquire knowledge, improve our theories, and strengthen arguments. Critical thinking is an essential part of creativity because we need critical thinking to evaluate and improve our creative ideas. In short, quality of life depends to quality of thinking.

Learning critical thinking skills are like learning other skills such art, games or use of music instruments. But it is unlikely to take place in the absence of a conscious commitment to learn. As long as we take our thinking for granted, we do not do the work required for improvement. Development in thinking requires a gradual process requiring plateaus of learning and just plain hard work. It is not possible to become an excellent thinker simply because one wills it. Changing one's habits of thought is a long-range project; it needs practice for years, not weeks or months.

In order to improve critical thinking skills we need to cultivate a personal thinking habit: we can take a few minutes to think before every idea we express, before every phone call we make, and before every task we do. Thus, we take few minutes after each activity to assess whether the desired result was achieved. If not, what was missing? How can put what was missing in the next activity? Or each day we can choose a problem to work on whenever we have free moments. We can choose a family problem or social problem selecting through community or media. We can figure out the logic of the problem by identifying its elements. It means systematically think through the questions - if we do not

ask question, we will not get the answer, like: What exactly is the problem? What are the chain causes? What is the root causes of the problem? What would we do if we were in the position of that organizer? Thus we can discuss and communicate with ourselves? While remembering not to focus on the problem focus on the causes, contexts and circumstances? And always look from different dimensions?

Hence, we need to rely on individual ability to reason rather than to using emotion and imitation. It relies on evidence and following evidence wherever it leads. It also relies on being an active learner or analyst rather than a passive recipient of information. It rigorously question ideas and assumptions rather than accepting them at face value. Critical thinkers always seek to determine whether the ideas, arguments and findings represent the entire picture and are open to finding that they do not. It will identify, analyse and solve problems systematically rather than by intuition or instinct. Hence, Critical Thinking is called the art of using reason to analyze ideas and dig deeper to get to our true potential. Critical thinking is not about thinking more or thinking harder; it's about thinking better. Honing your critical thinking skills can open up a lifetime of intellectual curiosity. But the journey is not all rosy. Critical thinking requires a lot of discipline. Staying on track takes a combination of steady growth, motivation, and the ability to take an honest look at contexts, even in the face of some uncomfortable facts.

So, the critical thinker we should not take information from authority until investigate it by ourselves. Taking information from authority can be useful. Instead of double-checking everything anyone says, we tend to label information as either coming from a trustworthy source or not. This keeps us from double-checking every piece of information that comes our way, saving time and energy. But it also keeps us from getting to the bottom of things we perceive as coming from a trustworthy source, even when they do not. Just because it was published in a magazine or broadcast over TV does not mean it's necessarily true. We must have habit of using instinct to investigate questionable pieces of information instead of being consumer.

If we do not question a fact, read about it or test it ourselves, soon enough, we'll build up a pretty good sense of what deserves more research and what we have determined to be true in our own judgment. In addition, we need to understand our own biases because human judgment can be subjective, frail, and spiteful. Understanding what your biases are and where they may affect how you deal with information.

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