

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



September 13, 2015

Food Insecurity in Afghanistan

As there are limited resources, the insecurity of food in Afghanistan has always been a dominant issue. There are millions of people in the country who do not have enough food to eat and consequently suffer from different problems.

According to a recent report – the 2015 Seasonal Food Security Assessment in Afghanistan (SFSA), published by Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC), the number of Afghans facing severe food insecurity has increased from 4.7 percent of the population 12 months ago to 5.9 percent today.

In other words, more than 1.5 million people are now considered severely food-insecure, an increase of more than 317,000. Another 7.3 million people, more than one in every four Afghans, are classed as moderately food-insecure.

In a joint report, last week, World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) painted a bleak picture of food security in the country.

It revealed that alarmingly, more people are compelled to sell land, discontinue the education of their children and make them work, or depend on relatives for support. The report highlighted that the number of people engaged in these last-ditch actions has doubled over the past year to more than 20 percent of food-insecure Afghans.

Claude Jibidar, WFP Country Director commenting on the situation has said, "When people resort to these measures, they have no resilience against future shocks. These figures are extremely alarming, especially in a country where more than one third of all people are already food insecure..."

On the other hand, FAO representative Tomio Shichiri predicted that Afghanistan could produce slightly more wheat this year, but the fact is that the poor people would not be able to purchase food from the market. The main issue is the access to food, not its production.

Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Assadullah Zamir has also referred to the disturbing fact that one third of the Afghan population is food-insecure and their situation continues to worsen.

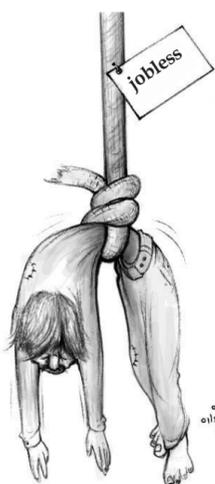
The agricultural sector in Afghanistan has not been able to fulfill the requirements of the people as it has not been given proper attention by the concerned authorities. Mostly, this sector is highly dependent on the individual farmers and landowners. Most of them grow as much as they require themselves. Further, the growth of narcotics in the country leaves little room for the lands to be used for the cultivation of other necessary items that can fulfill the food requirement of the people. The government does not have any comprehensive strategy regarding the development of the agricultural sector on the basis of modern techniques.

Therefore a large number of people, each year, have to look at the other countries for help in order to have food to eat. The international organizations in this regard have been fulfilling the food requirements of the country to a large extent, thus making the burden of the government much lighter. But this sort of help can never be permanent and it has already been facing difficulties as the donor countries that have been sponsoring such programs have decreased their contributions to a certain extent.

The food shortage itself is a sure problem, but there are many other problems that are directly linked with the hunger that results from such shortages. Many social evils will find their way in the society and will further deteriorate the country's socio-political scenario. More people would be involved in crimes in order to feed themselves and their families. Two major problems in the country have been greatly strengthened by the continuous hunger and poverty. The first one that has been threatening the whole world is the growing terrorism in the region. The people suffering from hunger and poverty are very much likely to become part of terrorist organizations that are ready to provide them their living.

Who does not know that the suicide bombers are easily available for some hundred dollars throughout the region? The second problem that has made the country much notorious like terrorism is the production and trafficking of narcotics. Afghanistan is considered one of the leading countries in this regard. And now the phenomenon has become a part of organized crime in the country, with the involvement of national and international mafia. The poor and hungry people of the country are ready to become a part of this menace instead of suffering because of intense deprivation. They either become a part of its production or trafficking as they are paid handsomely in this regard. Further, the demand of the narcotics also makes many people think of using their lands for poppy cultivation rather than deciding to grow the crops that can yield food for the people.

The important question at this instance is how long can we rely on international organizations and community to feed us and amend us? We can be self-reliant in so many areas; all we need is to throw away the begging bowl and use our own resources appropriately and, no doubt, honestly. Had we been doing that for the last few years, we would now be standing on our own. But unfortunately, the self-centered people among us who have just been filling their own pockets have made our people suffer to a great extent. They do not feel even for those people who do not have a single meal to eat throughout a week. Their children die of hunger and unknown diseases and their conscience saunter in the dark alleys of guilt, frustration and revenge.



Being Woman Calls to Unconditional Miseries!

By Asmatyari

There were too many adult men encircling the hapless lady – some have had seated, others kept standing in next row. Everybody seemed eager to have a look at the lady duly punished by the judge of local court. The unity displayed to have looking the lashing account of a woman was worth commending. Such degree of unity is rarely witnessed if it comes to denouncing an insane or illegitimate act. The onlookers indisputably, have had rejoiced the whole of story a woman beaten 100 lashes but nobody could dare questioning the legitimacy of Shariat and local court and the standard operating procedure if adopted to charge the culprits with the said crime.

Nonetheless, it was amidst throng of people that the lady with a man associate received 100 lashes being charged of keeping illicit relationship with each other. The sorry picture of the lady lashed in public depicts gravest state of helplessness and irrationality of law treating women. Undoubtedly, the sword of illicit charges always hangs over the neck of a female who dares to turn down a baffling order of public official or local elder. Going against the status quo, simply invites more trouble as witnessed in many cases.

The government instead of taking measures to uphold women rights is backlashes by enforcement of stoning in Afghanistan penal code. Human Rights Watch registered grave distress said that a working group led by the Justice Ministry that is assisting in drafting Afghanistan's new penal code had proposed provisions on "moral crimes" involving adultery that call for stoning. The political leader has got to lead the nation towards modernization that accepts democratic values and human rights matters. It is strange that till date the social participation of women deemed a taboo at large – makes them difficult to head to public offices on a distinct position. Women found exercising her willingness contrary to parental dictate is subjected to severe castigation and humiliation; is recklessly shunned to depth of utter hopelessness. The society where negation of unsound commandment is deemed immodesty and conceit, and pursuit of a rational discourse unpardonable sin, lies at the depth of moral abyss. Hence, a woman is bound to lead a life, at utter submission of her family associates. There are numerous heart wrecking incidents, equated anti-norms go unreported. The flawed cultural practices back growing gender biases and disparity. A woman is considered inferior, incompetent and mentally impaired, consequently is held liable of punishment even for a minor disobedience. She is, neither a partner in decision nor is known about the decision that dictates her fate. Ultimately, an absolute submission to the say of parent is the standard for decency.

The tales of helplessness ends not here, as is hampered every time she gets out in the pursuit of earning herself a modest livelihood. Our tolerance and patience turn off finding women chase a goal-oriented life. We

are born and raised underestimating girls, consequently we dare hindering equal participation of women in socio-political arenas; we strive hard equating their right to liberty and pursuit of happiness, bashfulness and contrary to Islamic teachings. Despite such assertions if one fails to impose ones' narrow and irrational interpretation, what they heard from so-called clergies, on others, tend to come up in the streets and shamelessly begin molesting the passerby girls and women. This is absolutely a great service they are paying to a morally civilized society.

Though not too many female students are enrolled in schools, yet it's appreciable to Taliban era, despite escalating but organized campaign to discourage them continue education. Poisoning water tanks of female educational institutes meant to harass the girls and parents quit education has turned into an undeterred plot that go untraced till date. Earlier, nearly 400 schoolgirls and teachers had to be hospitalized after being poisoned in western Herat province. According to Herat Zonal Hospital officials, more than 500 schoolgirls and teachers have been poisoned this last week. Last week, 190 schoolgirls were poisoned at the Habib Al-Mustafa School in Injil and another 160 at Babaji and Abdul Ali Tokhi Schools in Herat City. It is to none surprise the concerned public officials call the series of poisoning incidents a foreign conspiracy. On the other hand, the Deputy Governor alleges those kidnapping and terrorizing people have resorted to poisoning schoolgirls, is to none's surprise. Being ignorant of state of affairs the alarmed official rightly alleges an indefinable subject to being behind the regretful incident. This is a deliberate shift of responsibility elsewhere than to the core rationale to evade being questioned. The good about the sorry tale is, despite the recurrence of worst incident the government has not apprehended a single culprit on similar charges.

The worst state of affairs does not end here – the growing ratio of domestic violence another point to worry about. During couple of days, at least three women have died as a result of domestic violence and suicide in northern Afghanistan, according to media reports. Going through detailed account of credible statistics women are primarily demeaned and left vulnerable to violence. According to the AIHRC, more than 2,000 cases of violence against women cases were registered during the first three months of the ongoing solar year, compared to 2,500 cases during the entire last year. The official claims most of the victims of suicide attacks, roadside bombings, illegal courts, harassment and torture happened to be women.

The widespread ignorance provides strong reason to ongoing violence. The flawed cultural practices supported by high degree of illiteracy ratify intense violence against women, stand legitimate and justified. The culture deeming women as subordinate citizen multiplies their receptiveness to greater tendency of being subjected to worst treatment. Apart from formal education, community based adult education and awareness campaigns on momentous right's issues complementary to Islamic teachings might assuage the stringency of substandard customary law that undermines women rights.

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Political Trust will Lead to Peace

By Hujjatullah Zia

In spite of heavy casualties, the Taliban insurgents have expanded their sphere of power in Afghanistan. The battle between the Afghan soldiers and Taliban ragtag militants continue unabated in various parts of the country – which has created fears in public air. As a result, there are reports that at least 65 villages have been collapsed to the Taliban in Badakhshan province just few days back. The Taliban's intense attacks and suicide bombings have highly frustrated the nation and prompted a large number of Afghan youths to seek refuge to foreign countries.

This comes as the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) hunts for foothold in the country – which is a potential threat for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Based on local news, The ISIL loyalists have vowed to eliminate the Durand Line in a bid to unite and pave the way for the Muslims divided by the line. A spokesman for the terror group's self-proclaimed Khurasan province is quoted as saying that the Islamic State eye to destroy the borders similar as they did between Iraq and Syria.

The porous Durand Line has also been a source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan where numerous cross-border attacks have been carried out besides the bordering regions have long been and continues to be the main shelter of the terror groups. Meanwhile, affiliates of the terror group have doubled efforts to encourage the dissident high level Taliban commanders to join the ISIL group in a bid to further gain foothold in the country.

According to Khama Press, the spokesman for the terror group said a delegation of prominent scholars have been sent by the group's Khurasan province chief to Uruzgan province to meet with the senior Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor Dadullah, a senior Taliban commander.

This comes as the group claimed that Mullah Dadullah was rescued from an offensive by the Taliban militants involving 2,100 fighters in southern Zabul province. He said at least 230 ISIL fighters were deployed to Zabul from western Farah province to engage the Taliban militants and rescue Mullah Dadullah.

Mullah Dadullah says he is back to Afghanistan after turning down to work with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and said that the Taliban leaders are selected by the ISI. Dadullah, who is opposed to Mullah Mansour, the current Taliban leader, said Taliban militants who are under the control of Pakistan are fighting his supporters in southern Zabul province.

"They [ISI] proposed their recommendations for me which one of them was that I should kill people they want dead. They had other similar recommendations as well which were against Islam," Dadullah is cited as saying. He further added that, "They agreed to continue their financial, logistical and technical aid to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – the Taliban's so-called government – but I rejected their suggestions and I returned to

Afghanistan."

But on the other hand, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif voiced his concerns over the situation in Afghanistan, saying that no force can hamper the historic relations between Kabul and Islamabad. Addressing at a ceremony commemorating on Pakistan's Defense Day, September 06, he said his country would honestly fight terrorism. "We are concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. We have historic and blood relationships with Afghanistan. No force can break these ties. We have honestly struggled for stability in Afghanistan but a number of enemy groups are trying to damage our struggles. They will not succeed to reach their aim," the head of Pakistan's strong army said.

The Afghan-Pak relations had soured following a series of attacks in Kabul which left hundreds dead and wounded behind. Afghan officials believed that the attacks were systemized across the border and blamed Pakistan for failing to fulfill her commitments in combating terrorists. Following the Shah Shaheed bombing, President Ashraf Ghani said, "Pakistan still remains the venue and ground for gatherings from which mercenaries send us a message of war." Moreover, Afghanistan's intelligence service said a Pakistani intelligence officer helped the Taliban carry out an attack on parliament in June. Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of not doing enough to arrest Afghan Taliban leaders who have been meeting to decide on a successor to Mullah Muhammad Omar. Similarly, an Afghan delegation to Pakistan last month led by Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani demanded "serious and practical measures" from Islamabad over militant attacks it said came from across the border.

During a recent meeting with Pakistani National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz, President Ashraf Ghani reiterated Kabul's stance and asked Islamabad to move against terrorist groups inside its territory. "We reiterate our position and state facts, asking Pakistan to take action against terrorist groups inside its territory that declare war against our people," a statement from the president's office said.

After the meeting, Sartaj Aziz, who visited Kabul for a regional conference, told the Pakistani media that both countries had agreed to end the blame game and work to restore trust. Speaking on state television last Saturday after meeting Ghani, Reuters cited Aziz as, "The main thing that we both agreed upon was to restore trust, end the blame game against each other and create a positive atmosphere. We will work on establishing memorandum of trust building to avoid such a situation in the future." Since the Taliban and ISIL groups blackmail both the countries, the rift between Afghan-Pak officials will let the militant groups to widen their realm of power and gain firm foothold within Afghanistan and Pakistan and therefore, it has to be bridged. Both the countries should end the blame game and restore trust through combating terrorism honestly and eliminating the Taliban's sanctuaries.

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