

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



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Afghan Women Abandoned

Afghanistan is the land where women are treated as a third class citizen, and a household commodity, whose fate rests to parental sightless ruling. 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 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.

The tales of haplessness 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.

The graph of violence in Afghanistan such as domestic violence, honor killing, and sexual violence against women and young girls is escalating uninterrupted. Every alternate day endless tales of butcheries, physical torture, harassment and sexual assaults are surfaced where women render prey to flawed cultural practices, biased if not blind laws and Sharia doctrines. Unless the incumbent government takes bold and immediate actions undoing all such developments eroding and restraining the capabilities of women we may not prosper.

Earlier Amnesty International said women human rights defenders in Afghanistan who face mounting violence - including threats, sexual assault and assassinations- are being abandoned by their own government. In a report titled Their Lives On The Line, which was released in Kabul, Amnesty International states that this is despite the significant gains these women human rights defenders have fought to achieve. Their Lives On The Line documents how champions for the rights of women and girls, including doctors, teachers, lawyers, police and journalists as well as activists have been targeted not just by the Taliban but by warlords and government officials as well. Laws meant to support them are poorly implemented, if at all, while the international community is doing far too little to ease their plight.

The report states that rights defenders have suffered car bombings, grenade attacks on homes, killing of family members and targeted assassinations. Many continue their work despite suffering multiple attacks, in the full knowledge that no action will be taken against the perpetrators. Based on interviews with more than 50 women defenders and their family members across the country, Amnesty International found a consistent pattern of authorities ignoring or refusing to take seriously threats against women. Violence against women is a dramatic problem in Afghanistan that has caused lots of damages to the life of women itself as well as to the society. In Afghanistan violence against women is much widespread and deeply rooted in different parts of the country. Women have no or little voice to be heard and they have always been victims of violence either from their own family or from the society.

In a statement issued by Amnesty International they said there has been significant international investment to support Afghan women, including efforts to strengthen women's rights. But too much of it has been piecemeal and ad hoc, and much of the aid money is drying up.

Women not only constitute half of Afghan population but also can play foundational role in formation and development of the society and upcoming generation. They owe equivalent vigor to outstand and undertake the societal undertakings appropriately. Regrettably, they are deemed and treated second class citizen; meant to plague their innate capabilities rendering them dysfunctional. If properly educated and socialized they can be turned into valuable human resource earning enormous riches for poverty stricken country. If shun in constant denial they will degenerate without productive contribution.

As one woman defender explained to Amnesty International: "The threats now come from all sides: it's difficult to identify the enemies. They could be family, security agencies, Taliban, politicians." No woman in public life is safe - those facing threats and violence range from rights activists, politicians, lawyers, journalists and teachers. Even women in the police force are under threat, where sexual harassment and bullying is rife and almost always goes unpunished.

Despite the existence of a legal framework to protect women in Afghanistan - much of it is thanks to tireless campaigning by women's rights activists themselves - laws are often badly enforced and remain mere paper promises, says Amnesty International. Amnesty International's investigation found that a lack of political will on the part of Afghan authorities means that government bodies and officials charged with protecting women are under-resourced and lack the support to carry out their work.

The government and law enforcing agencies and other responsible authorities must come forth playing their responsive role against this very menace. Creating general public awareness against such practice might succeed discouraging them continue such deeds. The government in collaboration with society may win undoing socially charged abuses against women; granting them lead dignified life they deserve.



On World Health Day

By Dilawar Sherzai

7th April is celebrated as World Health Day internationally so as to highlight the challenges and opportunities that are associated health under the sponsorship of World Health Organization (WHO). The Day was first celebrated in 1950 and basically marks WHO's founding. Different sorts of international, regional and local events are organized by WHO on the Day so as to highlight the importance of global health. This year the theme for the Day is food safety under the slogan "From farm to plate, make food safe." There is no doubt in the fact that the role of food is immense in determining the public health. Clean and safe food can guarantee better health conditions but unsafe food can be really dangerous for health as they may contain harmful bacteria, parasites, viruses or chemical substances and can cause more than 200 diseases - from diarrhea to cancers. According to WHO, new data on the damage triggered by foodborne illnesses underline the global threats posed by unsafe foods, and the necessity for coordinated, cross-border action across the entire food supply chain.

Some initial observations from WHO's research (Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group - FEREG) that is expected to be released in October this year highlight some very ugly truths;

Some important results are related to enteric infections caused by viruses, bacteria and protozoa that enter the body by ingestion of contaminated food. The initial FEREG figures, from 2010, show that:

- there were an estimated 582 million cases of 22 different foodborne enteric diseases and 351,000 associated deaths;
- the enteric disease agents responsible for most deaths were Salmonella Typhi (52,000 deaths), enteropathogenic E. coli (37,000) and norovirus (35,000);
- the African region recorded the highest disease burden for enteric foodborne disease, followed by South-East Asia;
- over 40% people suffering from enteric diseases caused by contaminated food were children aged under 5 years.

Unsafe food also poses major economic risks, especially in a globalized world. Germany's 2011 E.coli outbreak reportedly caused US\$ 1.3 billion in losses for farmers and industries and US\$ 236 million in emergency aid payments to 22 European Union Member States.

Afghanistan is also one of the countries where there are serious concerns regarding the food safety. Neither there are proper and strict measures by the government to ensure food safety nor the people have enough awareness regarding the issue.

No proper and safe packing of the food items are ensured, even by large businesses. Moreover, many items are sold even after the date of their expiration and as the customers do not have enough knowledge of checking the dates, buy the items and use them without any hesita-

tion.

In addition, there are no proper control of different restaurants and hotels in the country and many of them do not fulfill the requirements of proper maintenance of cleanliness and food safety. Apart from the food items, the cooks and the hotel staffs do not take proper care of cleanliness and hygiene. And, there are many people across the country who go to restaurants and hotels for their daily meals. Thus, they are at great risk of being the victims of unsafe and non-hygienic food. Moreover, there are thousands of cart-owners who prepare different sorts of food items on the roadsides and they have many thousand customers. There is no measure taken to ensure hygiene and most of these food items are highly hazardous for health. The quality of the ingredients used, the dust and pollution from the road, the non-hygienic condition of the maker all add to the threats the food items will have for the health.

It should be noted that poverty and ignorance play a dominant role in aggravating the situation. It is very difficult to see the people, who do not have enough food to eat, taking care of hygiene and food safety.

For most of the people hygiene and cleanliness are a luxury, which they cannot afford. On the other hand because of ignorance many people do not take care of even the matters which they can. They, therefore, ignore the necessary measures while they produce, use and eat different food items.

Though poverty is an issue that can be dealt with in the long run, in the short run, measures can be pursued and should be pursued that can save many valuable lives. The government and the people as a whole must strive to ensure food safety before it is too late. Government must support institutions that are responsible for ensuring hygiene in the production of the food items, their packing and their preservation before the country faces any epidemic disease. As, WHO's Director for Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses says, "It often takes a crisis for the collective consciousness on food safety to be stirred and any serious response to be taken. The impacts on public health and economies can be great. A sustainable response, therefore, is needed that ensures standards, checks and networks are in place to protect against food safety risks." People, on the other hand, must fulfill their responsibilities, not only in their homes to guarantee better health for their family members but also be responsible member of the society, act ethically and make sure that whenever they are linked with food items that may influence the health of other members of society, they follow standards which they consider suitable for themselves and their family members.

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The Importance of Agriculture Sector

By Mustafa Nasiri

According to Jerzy W. (2013), agriculture is that kind of activity which joins labour, land or soil, live animals, plants, solar energy and so on; the Minister of Agriculture is the Minister of the beginning of life. So people who are involved with that kind of activity are involved in something special.

In a conference about sustainable development, held at the University of Tsukuba, when my contribution was asked about the matter, before I have said my piece, the moderator herself pointed towards sustainable agriculture in Afghanistan as the key to sustainable development. She was true and absolutely pointed the exact thing. When we talk about economy of Afghanistan, the word 'agriculture' unconsciously sparkles in our mind. For this country is an agricultural one, where the sector is still the key contributor to its GDP with about 25%, and feeds about 60% of its total population. Moreover, the export of products which not only bring cash to the country, but also demonstrate and exhibits the country's picture and feature to the world, however, are mostly agricultural products. The manufacturing sector of a country introduces the true image, the power and the potentials and capabilities of a country. In a globalized and commercialized era, when the name of Japan is taken, people think of Toyota, Suzuki, Panasonic and Sony; when we hear South Korea's name, we think of Samsung; when it comes to Germany, we think about Volkswagen and BMW; in case of USA, the names of Apple, General Motors and Ford come in our mind, and likewise.

In case of agricultural productions; USA is known for its Californian almond, maize and strawberry; Turkey for its apricot and cherry; Egypt for its date; China for its apple, wheat and vegetables; Iran for its stone fruit and pistachio; and likewise India, Brazil and Russia for their millet, Banana, Mango and chili pepper; sugar cane and oranges; and barley respectively. But what about Afghanistan? I feel very discontent and unfortunate to say, that our country does not have a good reputation and indeed we have shown a black feature of ourselves to the world. The country, influenced by war, unnatural disasters and political rivalries, is always at the top of opium producers list and with quite a disappointment, has gained a fame this way. This is at a time, when we have many other alternatives for opium cultivation. Our soil has the potential to produce 'Tashqurghani' and 'Kandahari' pomegranate and introduce this land as the cradle of pomegranate production. Our 'Sattarbai' almond can easily compete with Californian almond in terms of quality, if not in quantity and introduce us as the world's top almond producer, and many other potentials of this sector that can gain a good name for the country, generate income and employ labours. But things are not doing well in this sector. Our saffron is being smuggled across the border of one neighbor, post-harvest techniques practiced over it and then re-exported as the product of that country as the top quality saffron in the world. Our apple and some other fruits are being smuggled to our second neighbor, processed to low quality choice and then sold back in our own markets in much higher prices. These are only a handful of the whole sack. If we think deeply, we will realize that our neighbors enjoy free leasing of our land and free water of our rivers flowing to their farms and dams. They inflict hard labour work to our farmers and in return pay the amount equal to a bare subsistence.

Yes, as Jerzy says, agriculture is that kind of activity which joins labour, land, and so on. This sector, in developing countries such as Afghanistan which cannot manufacture non-agricultural com-

modities, is not only life, but also wealth which helps the life to improve. As George W. Norton & Jeffrey Alwang, in their book of Introduction to Economics of Agricultural Development, (1993) say; "For most developing countries, agricultural development matters for overall economic development. Agricultural development, spurred in part by education, the adoption of new technologies, and institutional improvements, can help stimulate broad-based economic development. The sector provides food, it supplies labor for industry, generates capital either directly or indirectly, including foreign exchange, and it provides a market for nonagricultural-goods-based services. It can potentially provide a direct increase in rural welfare."

But increasing rural welfare through this sector, which is attributed as life for majorities need a special person to recognize the prominent role of agriculture in economic development of Afghanistan. The person who should take a giant stride to treat agriculture as a serious economic and investment issue. That sort of man is recently nominated by the president for the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). He is Assadullah Zamir, a young, highly educated and talented elite whom I call the special person and an appropriate nominee for this key ministry due to two, but strong and enough reasons;

First; Zamir does not need time to orient himself with new environment in MAIL. He has already proved his intellectualities and good leadership skills at MAIL. He is used to articulating fruitful projects and initiating new developmental programs for the improvement of agriculture sector, as the engine of our fragile economy. If we evaluate the activities of agriculture sector of Afghanistan during the past 13 years, whatever improvements have come to this sector, are mostly after the development of National Agricultural Development Framework (NADF) during the period 2007-2009, and with no doubts, almost all the achievements can be attributed to agricultural projects and programs under the General Programs Directorate of MAIL. And Zameer was the director and that special person of this General Directorate. Projects such as NHLP that generate income for thousands of farmers and convert the horticultural system from a traditional one to a modern one with an outlook to cover all the 34 provinces and contribute in the rural welfare. And drive the sector towards mechanization and commercialization. Second; throughout history unnatural disasters have been caused by nonproductive politicians meddling in the natural economic order to steal the productivity of some for the benefit of other. Based on this fact, in my perception, one of the main reasons for mis-leading of key governmental institutions and ministries throughout the Karzai regime, was the nomination and selection of either unqualified figures or with inappropriate qualifications. But the nomination of Assadullah Zameer as the Minister for MAIL, along with some other qualified and well experienced young elites; such as Engineer Mahmood Baligh as candidate minister for the Ministry of Public Works (MoPW), and some other qualified and experienced ones are the new beams of hope who are expected to bring about improvement in their assigned ministries. Zameer, who I know more than others, is an economist with graduate degree from one of the most prestigious universities of the world in economics. Now nominated to lead an economic sector, agriculture sector, the engine of the country's economy.

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