

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



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School Girls Poisoned Again

poisoning innocent school girls has once again started in Afghanistan. There have been many such incidents in different parts of the country. It is believed that these actions are meant to discourage girls from going to school and pursuing education as their education is considered non-Islamic by Taliban extremists.

On Saturday, more than 100 girls were poisoned in Chahar Bagh School for girls in western Farah province. According to a statement by the provincial public health director, Abdul Zabar Shaiq, 106 girls were admitted to a local hospital after they were mysteriously poisoned and two of them were in critical condition. They had fever and were shivering as a result of the incident. He, however, mentioned that the poisoning was not serious. Moreover, the source of the poisoning was once again not identified.

Previously as well when such incidents took place, the gas that was used for poisoning was not identified at all. For example, last year in September, about 300 girls and female teachers were poisoned in three different incidents at two different schools in western Herat province. And, it remained mystery that what was actually used in the attacks. Moreover, such incidents have also taken place in Kabul, Bamyan, Jawzjan, Badakhshan and Maidan Wardak in the past few years.

In Afghanistan as per the parochial tribal norms and extremist religious beliefs women are not supposed to seek education. Their roles and responsibilities are confined to their houses and they are not permitted to leave the premises of their houses without the permission of the male members. And, the endeavors that are carried out to change this condition have to face severe opposition and even violence. There are examples wherein the extremists have thrown acids on the school going girls. Therefore, the parents have to be very cautious and even discouraged to send their girls to school.

Nevertheless, it should not go unmentioned that such attacks are really cowardly and show the mentality of the extremists. They are not able to stand against the developments in the society and, therefore, target the weaker stratum in order to show their waning strength. It is, nonetheless, important to note that the religious extremists have not only targeted the education of the girls but they stand against the modern education as a whole.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that there have been certain efforts to improve the modern education system in Afghanistan but they have not been steady enough to provide a solid base for better education to all the children of Afghanistan. There were some efforts by King Zahir Shah during the mid-20th century to promulgate education to as many children as possible. After him certain educational developments started during the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which designed many education policies so as to spread modern education among the people. Education was emphasized for both male and female. It was the first occasion when female education was given true importance. One of the basic reasons of the rise of women participation in education sector was the support of the government by Soviet Union. The presence and role of Soviet Union in Afghanistan will always remain controversial because of its imperialistic nature but its influence can never be ignored on the development of education sector.

Unfortunately, the civil wars that followed the withdrawal of Soviet regime from Afghanistan proved to be havoc for the education sector. Because of absence of strong government at the center, the situation of peace and order was shattered into thousand pieces. Various educational institutions were affected by ugly manifestation of violent intentions. With the rise of Taliban in 1996, the decline of education system which was already not in a satisfactory condition, started. Taliban banned the female education and promulgated the madrasah system of education, which was based on a very obsolete and improper methodology. The students were confined to a single approach towards education and that was the Clergy approach, which depended on an extremist interpretation of Islamic teachings. Investigation and research were banned strictly, and students were not allowed to question their teachers. Rather, they were asked to blindly follow what the Clergy approach had to offer them. The basic purpose of education was thus non-existent in the so called education systems of Taliban. They were more like training camps for generating cadre for terrorist groups.

Today the situation has improved marginally; however, it has yet to go miles so as to reach satisfactory position. The important factor to note is that the drawbacks in the system are hurting the weaker strata of the society to a larger extent and unfortunately women belongs to one of the same. Therefore, there are such incidents of violation of their rights throughout the country. Government authorities should take strict notice of such incidents and must try to make sure that the system treats every stratum of society in accordance to the demands of justice.



Political Harmony Must to defeat Taliban

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

The current season of war against the Taliban is a major test of survival and sustainability for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The Taliban are waging its fiercest war ever to gain major successes on the ground and capture key territories across the country. The government has come to the realization that it has no other option but to escalate the war against the Taliban in response to the group's recent resurgence. The government has long been criticized for lacking political will to fight the Taliban more decisively. But lack of political harmony and unity of action within the government seemed to be the major factor behind the government's failure to lead a robust campaign against the Taliban and other militant groups. Recognizing the situation, the government has been trying to rally support behind ANSF fighting the Taliban.

In the very first days its spring offensive, the Taliban organized large-scale attack on key districts of Kunduz province, and later carried out a deadly attack in Kabul which killed more than seventy people. The attack in Kabul indicated Taliban's ability to orchestrate deadly attacks despite all preparations made by ANSF to prevent the militants from making any gains in this war season. The attack indicated the determination of the Taliban for waging war in expense of peace efforts. It virtually doomed the hopes for Taliban coming to the table of peace negotiations with the government of Afghanistan. The deadly bombing in Kabul came as a wake-up call for the National Unity Government (NUG) to respond to Taliban's escalation of violence and escalate the campaign against the militant group.

President Ghani's speech at the parliamentary session was largely welcomed by lawmakers and politicians who were expecting the government to take stronger stance against the Taliban's call for war and violence. Many of the lawmakers in the parliament and some other politicians praised the government's move in toughening stance against the militants and its pledge to organize far-reaching offensive against them. The Afghan media also broadly welcomed the change of tone and shift of policy of the government against Taliban. All this suggested there is a broader public expectation from the government to overcome differences and hesitation in escalating the war against the Taliban and lead a stronger counterinsurgency campaign. The government has come to the right realization that in order to contain the Taliban's fresh resurgence, it is crucially important to rally political support behind ANSF.

However, the rallying call aimed at garnering political support behind stronger military action against the Taliban is not sufficient for the Afghan government to effectively lead the war and contain the Taliban's resurgence. NUG needs to work on a comprehensive policy on security issues and the anti-insurgency campaign backed up by all the stakeholders of the government. Divisions within the

government have always been hampering the government's efforts to maintain security. Politicians and observers believe there have been circles within the government who have sympathies to the Taliban and oppose government's move to escalate war against the Taliban with the hope the group would come to table of peace negotiations.

Unity of opinion and action within the government is key for success of the government to lead a robust military campaign against the militants. If NUG leaders really want to lead to robust campaign against the Taliban, they should isolate pro-Taliban figures and circles and cut their influence in the decision-making matters. The government would not be able to maintain firm resolve in fighting the Taliban if the decision making processes are undermined by officials who have sympathies towards the Taliban and hope they will denounce violence and come to the table of negotiation.

On the other hand, Afghanistan's political community is highly polarized over power-sharing issues, shortcomings of the unity government, personal politics-related grudges and other discontents. This would inevitably affect the overall situation in the country. President Ghani's recent speech in the parliamentary joint session was the first step towards garnering the crucial support from the country's political spectrum for leading a more robust campaign against the militant groups. The government needs to make it a priority to establish a broader national consensus for backing government efforts to stabilize the country and contain the Taliban insurgency.

More political cohesion in the country will help the government to effectively lead the campaign against the Taliban and boost public support behind the offensive. For promoting political cohesion around the anti-insurgency efforts, the government must be more transparent over its approach towards the Taliban and consult the political parties and the parliament over its actions. However, the national unity government has still its Achilles' heel from inside. It has been criticized as ineffective and incompetent as result of protracted divisions over power-sharing issues and failure to form a well functional administration. NUG needs to continue building on the current public and political support.

When it comes to leadership of war, perhaps the most important point of weakness for the Afghan National Security Forces' campaign against the militants is lack of leadership. NUG failed to resolve the issue of nominating the top officials for the key security agencies. President Ghani promised in his speech in the parliament he will soon nominate the minister for the ministry of defense to boost the leadership of ANSF. However, there is still room for pessimisms over his ability to keep his promise resolve the issue. The government needs to waste no time if it wants to fix the faulty leadership of the security agencies at this crucial juncture of time.

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Afghan Government Needs Introspection

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

With the recent attacks in Kabul the Taliban demonstrated that it's has become too easy for them to strike the capital at will. The Taliban wants to show ordinary Afghans how weak their government is, that it cannot protect them even in its stronghold. The Taliban definitely scored on that front. In the past two years, Taliban fighters have made extraordinary advances against the Western-backed government in Kabul, taking cities in the north and in Helmand province in the south, among others. The Taliban insurgency gained strength across Afghanistan since the withdrawal of international troops from combat at the end of 2014. The Taliban are now stronger than at any point since they were driven from power by US-backed forces in 2001. Afghan government assured the world and Afghans that after NATO drew down 350,000 plus strong Afghan security forces would be more than capable of holding back the Taliban but it's evident that is not happening. While the new Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor is consolidating power, the Taliban's nemesis the National Unity Government (NUG) is in disarray. This situation, along with several bold Taliban incursions throughout Afghanistan, shows the precarious state of affairs in Afghanistan. Afghan government is disappointing its people on various fronts. Let's talk about few of them.

Deteriorating Security

Overall security atmosphere across the country has deteriorated now even the security condition of capital resembles the rest of Afghanistan. It's a hard truth that the ability of Afghan security forces to hold government-held territory, let alone retake insurgent-controlled areas, is unclear and security concerns for much of the population remain high.

Collapsing Economy

Due to declining external financial aid, and ongoing political uncertainty and dysfunction of the government Afghan economy is in ruins. The Afghan economy has suffered from its lowest economic growth since 2001, and prospects for improvement in the short run appear weak. Domestic and foreign investments have also dramatically dropped.

Brain Drain

More than 60 percent of the population in Afghanistan is below the age of 30 which is a boon for the economy. But unfortunately young and professionally qualified people who can be the act as fuel for economic growth are leaving the country in droves, undertaking perilous journeys with uncertain future. But they bet on uncertainty over the chances of Afghanistan becoming a viable na-

tion state any time soon. They are anxious about the future, with some feeling they have no choice other than to leave the country in search of security and economic opportunity elsewhere.

Corruption

Corruption has long been a problem in Afghanistan but in recent times has become more grave. Afghanistan ranks 174 of 176 in Transparency International report and which makes it among the five most corrupt countries in the world.

Bad Governance

Ordinary Afghans have become disconnected and alienated from the national unity government and the country's other power arrangements. They are profoundly dissatisfied with Kabul's inability and unwillingness to provide basic public services. They intensely resent the abuse of power, impunity, and lack of justice that have become entrenched in recent time. People feel that their country has a nominal democracy which is often really governed by power brokers.

To sustain the hard earned gains made by the country after removal of hardliner Taliban regime in 2001. Some concrete steps have to be taken by the current leaders like. Both Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah has to redefine the role of their government and has to initiate institute reforms that can strengthen public support and improve the chances of obtaining further international assistance. Political leaders must not indulge in petty politics at such a crucial juncture. Afghan politicians must not let the country slide into chaos. Most notably Mr. Hamid Karzai, as former president, too must shun political ambition and should act as a peace broker rather than another power centre.

The vibrant civil society that has emerged in the last one decade too must realise that without a stable state, they cannot really function. Instead of confronting the already fragile government, they too need to play a more constructive role. NUG too must also act in the larger interests of the nation. The political deficit within the country is a big concern and to effectively tackle it, the government needs to be more accountable and effective.

Ghani and Abdullah may have divergent views on everything else, but they agree on one thing: to continue the coalition government. The two hence must sort out their difference lest they miss out a historic opportunity and the country remains in perpetual crisis. As a matter of fact despite its flaws the National Unity Government is Afghanistan's best bet for political stability. Though formed through a political agreement and compromise both parties to the government represent millions of Afghan voters who dared to walk to ballot boxes in the face of Taliban threats.

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