

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



December 22, 2016

57 Journalists Killed in 2016

The importance of media cannot be overlooked in today's world. Without media, it is really impossible to think of timely information sharing. And, in addition to the chief function of information sharing, media also has the significant role of having a check and balance within and generating pressure upon different organs of state. This is the reason many believe it to be the fourth organ of state; the other three organs being legislature, judiciary and executive.

The significance of media has also made the roles and responsibilities of the journalists paramount. Without their support and endeavor, it is impossible for media to generate timely news reports and collect reliable information. They are the ones who suffer from different sorts of difficulties but make sure that their duties are performed properly. During wars, clashes, riots, protests, calamities, celebrations and controversial debates they make their presence sure and try to disseminate the news to the people. However, in doing so they, unfortunately, face many accidents as well and in the process may lose their lives or get injured. Some of them even lose their lives because of the very fact that they perform their duties and let the people know about the facts.

In a recent report Reporters Without Borders (RWB) said that at least 57 journalists have been killed around the world in 2016 while doing their job. It explained that 19 were killed in Syria alone, followed by 10 in Afghanistan, nine in Mexico and five in Iraq. Almost all of those killed were locally-based journalists. Although it was fewer than the 67 killed in 2015, the group put the decrease down to "the fact that many journalists have fled countries that became too dangerous, especially Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and Burundi".

It said the withdrawal of reporters from these conflict-ridden countries had created "news and information black holes where impunity reigns". Nine bloggers and eight media workers have also been killed this year. RWB said the fall in deaths was also the result of the "terror" imposed by what it called "press freedom predators" who close media outlets arbitrarily and gag journalists. In Afghanistan, all of the 10 journalists killed were deliberately targeted because of their profession. Seven, including three women, were killed in a suicide attack in January on a minibus used by privately-owned Tolo TV.

It is also important to observe that many journalists opted to leave the country this year and migrated for their safety. There is no proper mechanism in place to ensure the safety of the journalists. They can be easily targeted by militants and in many cases they have to face violence and warnings from authoritative individuals within the parliament or the government itself.

The societies that suffer from political instability and experience wars, and disturbances and do not recognize the worth of true knowledge and information tend to forget the vital responsibility of guarding the rights of the journalists. The journalists in such societies tend to suffer from different sorts of discriminations and, unfortunately, even lose their lives.

Mostly conflict zones are dangerous for the journalists. In order to provide true and timely information, the journalists have to move into or close to the places where wars and conflicts happen. They, therefore, put their lives at risk and try to fulfill their responsibilities. Different groups, organizations or countries in such zones have to be very careful about the rights of journalists and make sure they are not targeted. However, that does not seem to happen and many journalists lose their valuable lives every year. Moreover, because of the influence and approach of different extremist networks, the number of journalists losing their lives in the peaceful countries is also alarming.

The situation for Afghan journalists does not seem to be getting any better. The rising insecurity and the lack of attention to the plight of the journalists has led to some very difficult circumstances that the journalists have to go through so as to perform their duties. Even the foreign journalists are facing serious difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities. Afghan authorities do not have any other option but to ask the journalists to limit their travels and their movements. If the journalists are not able to move freely and collect information easily how would they be able to perform their duties. Afghan authorities instead of limiting the movement of the journalists must ensure their security and the overall security in the country. Media Coordination Committee (MCC), a newly established organization, having the responsibility to ensure the safety of journalists and their media activities has also raised concerns over inaction of relevant authorities to investigate the cases of violence against reporters in Afghanistan. It is imperative that Afghan authorities must cooperate with the institutions like MCC, design better mechanism for the security of journalists so that they are able to perform their duties properly and keep the people informed and aware of their surroundings.



Injustice

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Despite written legal guarantees for social justice and non-discriminatory society, the underdogs are widely subjected to critical inequity due to racial, gender, religious, location and other differences. These fallacious and duplicitous trend pursued equates human dignity and values on the basis of flawed social and economic status, meant to earn personal gains at the cost of execution of talents and human capabilities. The society we live in is solely based on aristocratic and autocratic temperament – meritocracy finds no space instead is pushed to state of absolute denial. If you belong to an inferior gender, class, and ethnicity, you are left underprivileged and denied access to fundamental rights to life, equality, liberty and happiness. These social injustices constitute principle reason behind many political and social problems we face.

As Afghanistan is geo-strategic location, the foreign powers have always tried to have a direct or an indirect influence in this country's political strategy (military, economy, and social affairs). Thus, they have always tried to fuel the problems among these ethnic groups for getting through their own interests. In this sense, the country's multi ethnicity has hampered its development as a nation. Today, this discrimination has become like an indirect civil war in this land. There has never been an accurate population census taken in Afghanistan, but the most common estimate is approximately 30 million.

In spite of frequent outcry, the scheme of electronic ID card tactically has been deferred for the reason that it reveals that there is not a solitary ethnic group who form the absolute majority. Afghanistan can be considered a country of minorities as there is no group serving as a majority.

Nowadays, many of the social conflicts are grown from ethnic discriminations. These discriminations are created by internal and external factors to fish in. In fact, these conflicts are created by the competition between the ethnic groups to reach to power and gain influence. According to some analysis, the main reason of civil wars in Afghanistan was the involvement of external factors in interior affairs. It is widely believed by citizens that essentially Afghan people do not have any problems among them from the point of view of ethnicity and they have proved many times that they are united and they have defended their country and combated against the great powers.

During the civil wars, Afghans from different ethnic groups were helping each other to stay alive and they have given shelters to the other ones (from different ethnic groups), in order to save their lives. It means that, there were not ethnic groups fighting with each other; they were leaders who collected and abused the illiterate and poor people as an

army to fight against each other. Consequently, today people are once more afraid of this phenomenon by the name of ethnic discrimination existing everywhere (parliament, school, university, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, ministries...). When we work in social level, we can feel better the existence of discriminations and we find out that the rules, justice, payments...differ from one person to another one, due to which ethnic group the person belongs to or to which party the person works for.

As we see that today government employees are really dissatisfied about the varieties of the salary amounts in Ministries, in Afghanistan. Two people working in same place and having the same positions, they have different salaries under dissimilar name.

One of very historic example is central parts of Afghanistan; even in the last 15 years, the least attention has been given to the reconstruction of the central regions. Central people are convinced that the central government has carried out discriminatory policies against them, as their share in the enjoyment of hundred millions of dollars of international community's aid has been very small in comparison to the rest of Afghanistan. For instance, Bamyan province considered as a touristic region of the country, suffers from lack of electricity, access to safe drinking water, effective health care and educational facilities. It is evident that the situation in remote areas of is even inferior. Lack of proper roads in the region has deprived the people from being able to travel easily to all parts as well as other parts of the country. The situation further worsens during winter when heavy snow falls. Despite the fact that the regions which are much safer and secure in comparison to other parts of Afghanistan, the Afghan government has shown less interest to the reconstruction and progress of these regions.

As a final point, it is highly important that new generation believe that social justice and meritocracy are an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote rights of minority groups, gender equality, children and other vulnerable people. We cannot be deeply one unless we remove all barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.

Also, the government should advance social justice to remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, disability and replacing traditional with legal justice system. The noteworthy is that only legal justice saves a person from arbitrariness of course and ensures provision of justice to anyone, anywhere.

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The Ugly Face of Arab Spring

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Arab Spring, which started on December 17, 2010 in Tunisia with the Tunisian Revolution, was a milestone around the globe. By the end of February 2012, rulers had been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen; civil uprisings had erupted in Bahrain and Syria. Protests in Syria started on January 26, 2011, when a police officer assaulted a man in public at "Al-Hareeka Street" in old Damascus. The man was arrested right after the assault. As a result, protesters called for the freedom of the arrested man. Soon a "day of rage" was set for 4-5 February, but it was uneventful. On March 06, 2011 the Syrian security forces arrested about 15 children in Daraa, in southern Syria, for writing slogans against the government. Soon protests erupted over the arrest and abuse of the children. Daraa was to be the first city to protest against the Ba'athist government, which has been ruling Syria since 1963. The unrest triggered nationwide protests demanding President Assad's resignation. The government's use of force to crush the dissent merely hardened the protesters' resolve. By July 2011, hundreds of thousands were taking to the streets across the country. Opposition supporters eventually began to take up arms, first to defend themselves and later to expel security forces from their local areas. Violence escalated and the country descended into civil war as rebel brigades were formed to battle government forces for control of cities, towns and the countryside. Fighting reached the capital Damascus and second city of Aleppo in 2012.

Now, more than 250,000 Syrians have, reportedly, lost their lives in armed conflict and more than 11 million others have been forced from their homes as forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those opposed to his rule battle each other – as well as jihadist militants from so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The UN has accused ISIS of waging a campaign of terror. This group has inflicted severe punishments on those who transgress or refuse to accept its rules, including hundreds of public executions and amputations. Its fighters have also carried out mass killings of rival armed groups, members of the security forces and religious minorities, and beheaded hostages, including several Westerners.

The ISIS fighters practiced their radical ideology in Syria and fueled the war. Moreover, they widened their realm of influence and carried out terrorist attacks not only in the Middle East but around the world. For instance, a terrorist attack on November 13, 2015 in Paris, the capital city of France, killed at least 130 people and wounded many others. Similarly, the terrorist attack carried out in San Ber-

nardino, California on December 02, 2015, killed 14 people and injured 21 more – both the attacks had, reportedly, link with the ISIS group.

On Monday, December 19, 2016, the Turkish Officer Mevlut Mert Altintas gunned down Russia's Ambassador Andrei Karlov as the diplomat spoke before an exhibition of Russian photos at an art gallery in the Turkish capital of Ankara. After killing the ambassador, Altintas, a 22-year-old officer with the riot police, denounced Russia's role in the Syrian war, screaming: "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria!" The shooting was among the most brazen retaliatory attacks yet on Russia since Moscow entered the war in Syria on the side of President Bashar al-Assad and unleashed a bombardment on Aleppo that has drawn international condemnation for what observers on the ground have called indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

Although, there was not yet any evidence that the shooter belonged to any radical Islamic groups, such as ISIS or the Nusra Front, the words of killer reveals his radical mindset and his tendency towards the ideology of ISIS. Based on his slogan, he resorted to this act of violence for the defeat of ISIS group in Aleppo.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the deadly truck rampage through a Berlin Christmas market a likely "act of terrorism".

The incident had echoes of the deadly truck assault in the French city of Nice in July that killed 86 people and was claimed by the ISIS group. Initially Germany officials had hesitated to use the word "attack." But early Tuesday police issued two tweets, one describing it as a suspected act of terror and the other declaring that "the truck was deliberately steered into the crowd at the market."

The deaths in Berlin came just hours after a gunman in Zurich opened fire in an Islamic center, wounding three people who were praying, according to news reports. Police later found the gunman dead 300 yards from the scene of the shooting. In July, a 27-year-old rejected Syrian asylum seeker detonated a bomb near the entrance to a music festival in the center of the southern German town of Ansbach, killing himself and wounding several people.

Although the Arab Spring aimed to strengthen democratic practices and defend the rights and liberty of the people and it also bore positive results in this regard, the horrible consequence is also beyond doubt. As a result, the war in Syria is the product of Arab Spring where the ISIS group could put its ideology into practice – which stoked sectarian violence and inflicted heavy casualties upon the civilians. In addition, the ISIS group seeks to gain foothold in

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