

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



February 08, 2017

Afghan Civilians Defenseless Against Insecurity

The series of tragedies and misfortunes does not seem to end for Afghanistan. Insecurity, which has been the main culprit in invigorating the miseries, has not even decreased in winter. It has influenced different parts of the country in different ways and every now and then it targets the capital Kabul. It did so on Tuesday, February 7, as well when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives in the car park of the Supreme Court building in Kabul, killing 20 people and wounding at least 41 others. The incident occurred in the car park of the Court at about 3:45 pm, while staff were on their way home.

In June 2013 an explosion occurred in the same place, killing 17 people and injuring 39 others.

It is important to note that the casualties were mostly the civilians. Civilians in Afghanistan have been influenced to a large extent by insecurity. In fact, it has been decades since Afghan people have suffered the brutal consequences of insecurity and instability. Many Afghans have lost their lives and many have left their houses and fled to other areas and even migrated to other countries.

Their entire existence has been shaken, and their entire way of living has been altered for the worst. And, it is unfortunate to see that they have not been able to experience improvement even after having a golden opportunity for betterment. In fact, Afghan leadership and authorities were not able to make use of the circumstances in their favor. After the downfall of Taliban, the country had a golden opportunity to move towards betterment. It had the support of the international community, in particular, the support of the US.

However, it could not make use of that support in a positive manner and the leadership struggled because of internal rifts and differences, which is evident even in the present.

And who have paid the price for all the mismanagement and ill handling of the situation? Definitely, the poor civilians.

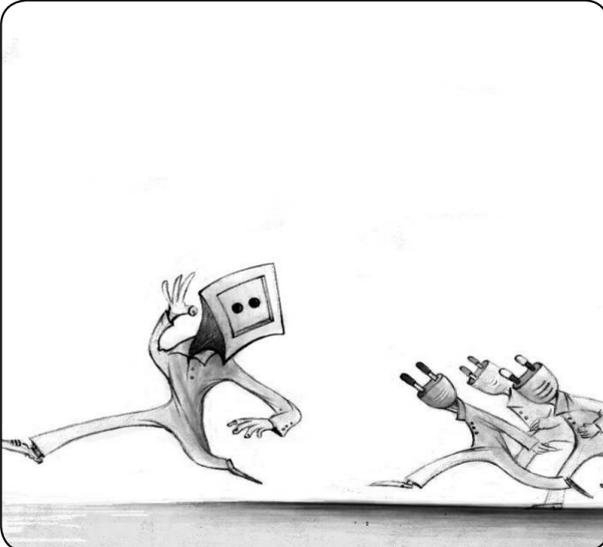
Afghan people, mostly poor among them, have seen the worst type of poverty, illness, under-development and misery. In fact, they have been left defenseless both against the rising social evils and the persistent insecurity. The facts regarding the lives of the poor people in remote areas of the country show the true picture. There has hardly been any development in those areas. Development could only be seen in some cities of the country in the lives of a particular stratum of the society, while most of the people remain distant from it.

How the lives of the civilians in Afghanistan have been influenced by insecurity can be best depicted by the recent report by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA report issued on Monday recorded the highest ever number of civilian casualties in a single year, including record figures for children killed and injured in 2016. It revealed that there were 11,418 conflict-related civilian casualties, including 3,498 killed and 7,920 injured.

Of these, 3,512 were children - 923 dead and 2,589 injured, up 24 per cent on the previous highest recorded figure, which is the highest since the UN began systematically documenting civilian casualty figures in 2009. The report also revealed that Anti-Government forces, mainly the Taliban, were responsible for almost two thirds of the casualties while pro-Government forces were responsible for almost one quarter. The report noted that as in 2015, ground engagements between Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces, particularly in areas populated or frequented by civilians, remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices (IED), suicide and complex attacks, as well as targeted and deliberate killings. The ongoing situation in Afghanistan can be well depicted by the statement of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein - "The casualty figures painted a picture of the most vulnerable sectors of society paying the highest price... Children have been killed, blinded, crippled - or inadvertently caused the death of their friends - while playing with unexploded ordnance that is negligently left behind by parties to the conflict. Women continue to be brutally punished in parallel so-called 'justice' processes while religious minorities are targeted as they pray in their mosques... And the consequences of each act of violence ripple through families and entire communities that are left broken, unable to sustain themselves and largely failing to obtain any semblance of justice or reparation.

After nearly 40 years of constantly evolving armed conflict in Afghanistan, a Daesh franchise has now surfaced as an additional, deadly component. It is about time the various parties to the conflict ceased the relentless commission of war crimes and thought about the harm they are doing to their mothers, fathers, children and future generations by continuing to fuel this senseless, never-ending conflict."

The need of the time is to realize the sufferings that the poor civilians are going through and carryout necessary measures to eradicate these sufferings. Without realizing the pain and the misery of the people, it is impossible to soothe them and take initiatives to end these miseries and pain.



Moscow: Seeking to Play a Major in Afghanistan

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Given the new moves, it seems that Moscow is seeking to play a major role in the country by boosting military and economic cooperation with Kabul. However, it follows a series of cooperation in last 15 years for example cancellation of Afghanistan's remaining debt around 891 million US dollars, delivery around 20,000 AK-47 rifles and ammunition to the Afghan interior ministry and training of some 250 Afghan police. Also, Cooperation in Kabul Prefabricated Housing Factory, that had produced the apartment blocks for Kabul's 'Microrayons' and housing projects in Mazar-e Sharif, received 25 million US dollars in new equipment from Russia. Thus, Russian companies took part modernizing Naghlu dam east of Kabul (a contract valued at 32.5 million US dollars), and building electricity generating facilities in Badakhshan, Parwan, Paktia and Bamyan and a 3G mobile communication network in northern Afghanistan and also comprising some other minor aids.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Salahuddin Rabbani is on a visit to Moscow on an official invitation from his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, whom he will meet on Tuesday to have in-depth discussion on various issues. The statement further stated that the two sides will hold talks on political, technical, military, economic, trade and cultural issues. The two sides will also hold talks on other issues including the shared security challenges and issue of the drugs, the statement said, adding that the issue of mutual cooperation on international conventions and conferences will also be discussed. The planned visit by Minister Rabbani to Russia comes as reports emerged recently suggesting growing contact between Russia and the Taliban group.

In the meanwhile, Moscow announced readiness to boost support to the Afghan security forces in their campaign against Daesh, the Russian foreign ministry has said. They also offers 485 scholarships to Afghans including 185 military and 300 civil education scholarships to Afghan students and reiterated continued support to Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) has said that Afghanistan supports any move that can help eliminate the terrorist group in the region and the world. "We welcome any move which can help to weaken terrorist groups especially Daesh. But we should not forget that the Afghan security forces have inflicted major blows to Daesh," said MoI deputy spokesman Najib Danish. This happens after several times concerns raised by Russia over rise of Islamic extremism among Russia's substantial Muslim population, in addition to separatist movements among certain ethnic groups, particularly the Chechens. Ahead of the Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani's visit to Moscow, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued the warning in a commentary released on Saturday. "We watch closely the situation with security in Afghanistan, and we are concerned about the growing combat and terrorist activities of the armed opposition,"

the ministry said. It further noted that "great concerns are caused by the spread of influence" of Daesh. The ministry also highlighted the importance of relations between Moscow and Kabul in the fields of technology and military and voiced Russia's support for the Afghan reconciliation process.

"We consider as important directions the continuing military-technical cooperation with Kabul, support in improvement of combat capacity of the Afghan national security forces, as well as training of the republic's military and police personnel by Russian respective authorities," it added. Russia has always been suspicious of the former anti-Soviet alliance, especially as many of its former satellite states in Eastern Europe and the Balkans accede to the North Atlantic Treaty. Unsurprisingly, Moscow is wary of the presence of so many NATO and US troops along its southern frontier. Russia supported the overthrow of the Taliban and wanted to see a stable government emerge in Kabul. It allowed the US and its partners to set up bases in its "near abroad" in Central Asia - Uzbekistan and later Kyrgyzstan - and allowed for the transport of supplies through Russian territory.

Outside its borders, Russia is concerned about the growth of Islamism and terrorism in its traditional sphere of influence or "near abroad" - the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Many militants from these areas have significant ties to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, or other groups in Afghanistan, and therefore its interest demands not to see Taliban comeback in Kabul or a failed state emerge in Afghanistan. While the Kremlin may disapprove of NATO's presence along its southern frontier, it does not want to see Afghanistan become a safe haven for a separatist, terrorist, or Islamist forces.

While some circles claim that over the past fifteen years, Kabul has failed to come up with a strong strategy to mend ties with Russia. Karzai and Ghani both are blamed for their failure to mend relations with Russia over the past fifteen years. "The uncle of Mr. Karzai (former Afghan president Hamid Karzai) was serving as ambassador there and he also failed to bring the ties back on track. Now that Dr. Ashraf Ghani appointed his uncle there, he also disappointed our neighbor; we heard that for a long period of time he stayed in Kabul and did not return to Russia," said Sayed Eshaq Gailani, chairman of the Nahzat-e-Hambastagi Milli Afghanistan party. But Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) believes that the complexity of the issues in the region cannot be resolved by a single country. "It is not the question of foreign policy failure, security in the region is much more complicated and it is difficult to address these issues only through foreign policy. Main parts of the security aspects in the region are related to wider international issues and these issues are outside the circle of Afghanistan's foreign policy," said Faramarz Tammanna, head of Afghanistan Center for Strategic Studies at MoFA.

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Cold Weather Aggravates Challenges

By Hujjatullah Zia

The sufferings and misery of the poor have been compounded by the severe cold and heavy snow. A large number of Afghan people are engaged in manual labors from dawn to dusk to make the ends meet. However, with the increase of unemployment, some may have only roof over their heads and can hardly provide food and clothing for their family members. Scores of children will take the hope of going to school to the grave with them and forced to labor so as to alleviate the financial pressures of their families. Life, for them, is no more than pains and sufferings. If you walk on Kabul streets, you will see countless children engaged in banal tasks from plastic sending to shoe-polishing. Their only claim to fame is to earn a penny in order to survive hunger as well as save their siblings. Similarly, widows, the husbands of whom might have been killed in battles against terrorist groups, moan from early morning to late evening to keep their children alive.

They are seriously beset with financial problems and their painful beseeching can hardly get passersby to hand them a penny. Poor are the children who were born in such families and inherit their bad luck namely anguish and misery. In other words, some children are born and bred on the street, continue the same life-style and hand it down to the next generation. No job, no home and no birth control! So, the wintertime compounds the hardships of those poor women and children. They live in crumbled houses and slums or simply on streets.

These people who earn their bread and butter by begging, how is it possible for them to obtain fuel for heating? Even though, their bodies are numb with cold and their faces pale with hunger, they still surpass death.

The nature has been very cruel recently. The avalanches struck after three days of heavy snow, which has destroyed scores of homes, killed at least hundred people and blocked roads mainly in central and northeastern provinces, making it difficult for rescue workers to reach the stricken villages. The bulk of the deaths however occurred in remote Nuristan province, where at least 50 people were killed in a single village. Elsewhere 54 people were killed in northern and central Afghan provinces, where officials said massive avalanches destroyed 168 houses and killed hundreds of cattle. Deadly avalanches are common in Afghanistan's mountainous areas in winter and rescue efforts are frequently hampered by lack of equipment. Despite billions of dollars in international aid after the ousting of the Taliban government in 2001, Afghanistan remains among the world's poorest nations. Last month heavy snowfall and freezing weather killed 27 children, all under the age of five, in Jawzjan prov-

ince in northern Afghanistan.

The silence of the government officials is very disappointing. The fact is that they live in skyscrapers, eat sumptuous meals, drive costly vehicles; no pains and pressures touch them. Hence, in such a utopian world, how can they realize the meaning of difficulties and poverty!

They do not ever want to imagine the dystopian world of the poverty-stricken families.

Thomas Hobbes says "As machines, human beings pursue their own self-interest relentlessly, mechanically avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure." In this world, many are as machine, bereft of human feelings, emotions, sympathies and dignities, pursuing pleasure at the cost of others' lives. They threaten, torture and murder in order to benefit in every possible way. For instance, besides suffering poverty, some locals wrestle with many other challenges, such as, robbery, burglary, kidnapping, murder, etc. No wonder, the mentioned crimes are engendered by extreme misery.

The fact is that humanity is moribund and moral standard is being eroded. A well-off family will not care if its next-door neighbor has nothing to eat. After all, a poor person will be treated with humiliation and contempt whereas a rich one will be held in high respect just for the sake of their money. It is simply said that 'money talks'. In daily life, one's personality is measured on the basis of their wealth. The richer you are, the more important you will look.

In natural life-style in which machinery and modern technology had no influence, the ethical code and humanity are believed to held strong sway. People shared strong ties with one another and had empathetic feelings towards one another. The gap between the poor and the rich was not as wide as it is in the modern world. Even in feudalism, the lower ranks of society worked and fought for the higher ranks for receiving land and protection. But now, there is neither land nor protection for the workforce.

Moreover, the government is not able to use the workforce in the right way and there is no strategy for tackling the mass unemployment. Therefore, a large number of Afghans immigrated to foreign countries, at the cost of their lives, to get the financial pressures alleviated.

If they return to the country in such a critical time, the challenges will be compounded with too much workforce and no employment.

The question to be answered by the government is that are there any effective strategies to tackle the issue of refugees and unemployment? The public misery will continue unless the government adopts an effective and nationwide strategy to put an end to the financial challenges.

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