

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



January 16 2017

A Silver Lining in Syria

The Syria's war is a great tragedy of modern world and a highly negative milestone in the history of human society. The humanitarian law was widely violated by militant fighters, mainly with the firm foothold of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Syrian nation suffered severely and sustained large casualties, which fill one with a strong sense of fear and disgust. Once a developed country, Syria has been changed into debris and constitutes one of the largest numbers of refugees in the world.

The major Syrian opposition groups, including the largest one, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), are likely to attend the upcoming talks on the Syrian settlement in Astana, Kazakhstan, which will be held with Assad's regime. A Syrian opposition delegation is said to arrive in Moscow on Tuesday to discuss the Russia-Turkey brokered talks between warring sides in the Middle East country.

Achieving a general ceasefire in Syria has been central to every diplomatic initiative to end the conflict since the United Nations Security Council issued a presidential statement endorsing what was known as the "Kofi Annan plan" on March 2012. But getting the combatants to comply was never going to be easy, not least because their external backers were not prepared to go far enough to make them do so.

The ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey on December 29, 2016, is no different. But this time the stakes may be high enough to force Russia's hand, opening an avenue towards more effective diplomacy, albeit geared to more modest objectives than reaching a full peace deal.

The horrible consequence of Syria's deadly war is indescribable and if it does not come to an end the casualties will be terrible. A great deal of Syria's men, women and children lost their lives or amputated by warring sides as bombings and attacks targeted people indiscriminately, some of whom are turned blind eye. A number of Syrian citizens, who lost their sights in the war, are paid less attention. As a result, World Braille Day was observed last week, but little public attention has been paid to the plight of Syrians suffering from visual impairments, either caused by or worsened by the country's five-year-old civil war. Since Jordan shut its border with Syria last summer after a car bomb, only a handful of refugees have been allowed out for medical treatment, according to Doctors Without Borders.

In refugee-hosting countries, including Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, more often than not it falls to NGOs and charities to provide urgent medical treatment, and for those with visual impairments, long-term supports such as Braille machines and adapted computers. But because they are not considered life-threatening, eye injuries may not be a priority for such organizations, which face large funding shortfalls.

There are no overall statistics on how many Syrians have lost their sight because of conflict-related wounds. But indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, attacks on healthcare facilities and a lack of access for medical workers have led to deteriorating conditions. When Assad regime forces retook Aleppo city in December and civilians were displaced to the surrounding areas, doctors reported multiple cases of untreated shrapnel wounds causing loss of vision. By and large, neither of the sides is believed to have observed humanitarian law. Civilians suffered in the worst possible way. For instance, women, belonging to minority groups, were forced to Jihad-e-Nikah and raped constantly by the ISIL fighters. Streams of blood were shed and many were dishonored before the eyes of international community, which suggested no effective panacea for the problem. On the one hand, the public believe that "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind" and on the other hand, it is stated that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". Terrorist networks such as ISIL, Boko Haram and like minded groups are likely to humiliate human rights more than any other parties and seek to impose their warped minds on individuals at gunpoint at the cost of their lives and honor.

Needless to say, neither ideologues nor mercenary fighters have something to lose and will show no inclination to peace talks. They intend to muddy the water and take advantages of political turbulence - this fact has been proved in Afghanistan. As a result, Afghan government sought peace more than a decade without any breakthrough as the Taliban showed no tendency in this regard. It is because a peaceful country will narrow the realm of their political interests. For instance, they would not be able to smuggle drug, extract resources or force people to pay taxes, etc. Hence, since the ISIL fighters aim to satiate their carnal desires through announcing Jihad-e-Nikah, it will never be acceptable in a country based on law. It is important that both the negotiating sides will have to make peace and join forces against the ISIL group or else the situation will deteriorate with each passing day. The international community, along with countries involved in Syria's issue, will have to support peace so as to protect the rights of the public and put an end to violence and bloodshed.



The Wide Vacuum for Democracy

By Hujjatullah Zia

The hegemony of democracy has been challenged in Afghanistan as the rights and liberty of individuals are violated egregiously. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the nation took active part in political decision-makings through electing their representatives. Within the last decade and so, the presidential and provincial elections and peaceful transfer of power has been prominent milestone in the country's history. Democratic discourse, human rights and empowerment of women have been hotly debated and Afghans dreamed of utopia, where militants had no room.

Democracy in Afghanistan has not passed a normal process but ebbed and flowed within different regimes. Amanullah Khan is believed to sow the seeds of democracy in the country during his regime (1919-1929). But his exaggerated movement, which disregarded the traditional customs and cultural values, triggered a strong reaction from the public, mainly from the religious figures, leading to the downfall of his regime. The germ of this thought paved the ground for democratic practices.

Subsequently, democracy was considered to secularize the cultural values and resisted against it publicly. The radical elements, mainly in tribal belts, and dictatorial regimes hampered democratic practices in one way or another. Afghans suffered severely and their rights to life, liberty and estate were violated on a large scale.

By and large, the last decade of Zahir Shah's kingdom, was called the "decade of democracy" or "decade of constitution". In the solar year of 1343, the constitution of Afghanistan was approved by Loya Jirga (National Grand Assembly) and a free parliamentary election was conducted. This constitution, which restricted the King's power, was considered the best one comparing to the past constitutions. Similarly, this constitution did not discriminate one on the basis of their race, color or sex and women were allowed to be the candidates for parliament. This was also a high step towards democracy.

To cut it short, democracy was repressed during the Taliban's regime as people were killed in wholesale for their accidental backgrounds and ideological differences. Women bore the brunt of the regime's aggression and cruel practices. The Taliban's fundamental ideology was in strong conflict with democracy. Afghans underwent indescribable sufferings and their freedoms were curtailed.

With the downfall of the Taliban's regime, Afghanistan moved towards democracy following the Bonn Conference held on December 2001. The constitution of Afghanistan was approved in a Loya Jirga conducted in Kabul in 2004. In the preamble of this constitution, protecting human rights and dignity, observing Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and United Nation's Charter have been underlined and the government

has been committed to form a civil society, where people could exercise their fundamental rights freely. Moreover, any kinds of discrimination on the grounds of one's race, sex and color are forbidden as article 22 states, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law."

Additionally, freedom is considered the inherent right of mankind and article 24 maintains, "...Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." In short, this is a unique constitution in the history of Afghanistan and will alleviate the social and political challenges if enforced properly.

Despite this fact, the nation's pains and sufferings have not come to end. Afghans still bleed as a result of terrorism and unmitigated insurgency. In other words, the Taliban, along with other militant groups, trample upon the rights and liberty of Afghan men and women. There are two main obstacles before peace and stability: First warring factions, mainly the Taliban, undermine democracy via spilling the blood of combatants and non-combatants alike. Similarly, the emergence of self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) deteriorated the security situation. The affiliates to ISIL stoke sectarianism and spread fear and anxiety in the air. In a nutshell, the high graph of civilian casualties put democracy under question.

Secondly, the government was unable not only in enforcing the law but some officials were involved in corruption. After all, the constitution was widely violated by the government and even parliamentary election was not held despite the termination of its legal period. In another item, parliament is considered the "beating heart of democracy", and this heart beats no more in the country. The National Unity Government (NUG) failed to protect the rights and liberty of the nation, which was stated in the constitution.

Similarly, political tensions among the high-ranking officials also narrowed the room for democracy. They focused their attention on self-interests rather than paying heed to more pivotal issues. The militant fighters are believed to have taken advantage of the political turmoil and widened their realm of terrorist activities.

Democratization has been largely hampered by social and political challenges and there is much to be done to strengthen the nascent democracy and protect the rights and freedom of the nation. With the escalated militancy and emergence of many warring factions, Afghans' dream for a civil society did not come true and all the hopes were shattered. So, the vacuum for democracy will not be filled only with written law when not enforced or unfair election.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Let's Learn from the Experience of Japanese Education

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Japan is one of the unique societies in the world that pay great importance to education. The introduction of a modern education into Japan, taking several Western countries as models, began in the latter part of the 19th century. The arrival of modernization in Japan was therefore comparatively late, but education underwent very rapid development within a short span of time. It happened because the socio-cultural conditions in Japan were favorable for the development of education; On the other hand, education was one the first national priority such that allocated nearly 70% of national budget. And legally, education promulgated compulsory at elementary and lower secondary levels. As a result, it did not take too long that Japan became one the great economy power and ranked as a highest quality education with Zero illiteracy in the World!

There are several factors contributed to surpass the world: firstly, for the preceding 250 years of the Edo period, during which Japan followed a policy of keeping the country closed to the outside world under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868), the country enjoyed a long period of peace and social stability. Private academies (Shijuku), equivalent to secondary schools, developed and were open to all regardless of Social classes. And there were also a large number of popular learning houses called Terakoya, which concentrated on teaching the practical skills of reading and writing to the commoners. Among the merchant and the technician-worker classes, an apprenticeship system was developed. And among the people it was popular to learn the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, classical musical instruments and other traditional arts. Under these conditions, the people of Japan were able to attain quite a high level of cultural maturity.

Secondly, the socio-cultural circumstances was free of extremism tendencies thereby the educational institutions remained entirely safe of retrogressive influences. Thirdly, as a result of the feudal system and the system of social classes, the formation of a common national consciousness had been held back. However, amidst the atmosphere of crisis in the face of external pressure at the end of the Edo period, there was a strong awareness that national unity and national consciousness could be formed through education. In the process of groping to modernize the nation in the mid-19th century, a consensus was formed with the aim of abolishing the traditional class system and offering an equal educational opportunity to all people of Japan. Fourthly, near the end of the Edo period, a system that recruited people on the basis of individual knowledge and ability was introduced in place of the traditional class system. It became clear that the elite members of the society were being selected on the basis of their academic attainment. In this way, the initial conditions had been laid for the advent of a "academic-credentials society" in which employment and social status were decided on the basis of a person's educational attainment.

Fifthly, the government employed many foreign consultants

while paying them exceptionally high salaries. In the early institutions of higher education, many courses were instructed by foreign professors. At the same time, the government sent large numbers of capable students to study abroad. After studying for a number of years, they returned to Japan and in a very short space of time replaced the foreign instructors. To finance these enterprises, the government was forced to invest large amount of its available funds. Under these circumstances, the government became largely dependent on local government funds, taxes on the residents of school districts, and tuition fees for the establishment and running of elementary schools.

Moreover, Japan maintained its independence in educational policy making as it was not colonized by the super powers; it did not have the colonial legacy in the education introduced by former rulers while it was the case with many other developing countries, consequently at the time that modern educational system was introduced, Japan was able to select at will and try out various models provided by different developed countries. Quantitatively, there are estimated 550 well-facilitated schools per one million populations in Japan comparing to Afghanistan here are estimated 300 poor schools per one million people. Japan has 23,633 elementary schools, 11,134 junior high schools, 5,450 senior high schools, 995 schools for the handicapped, 702 universities, 525 junior colleges, and 14,174 kindergartens. School attendance rate for the nine years of compulsory education is 99.98%. Private schools also receive a great deal of public funding, with the Japanese government paying 50% of private school teachers' salaries. Other forms of funding are capital grants, which go to private schools for specific costs, including new buildings and equipment. While private schools are considered to be more competitive and prestigious than public schools, public schools still account for 99% of primary schools and 94% of lower secondary schools. There are many more private upper secondary schools, however; 23% of upper secondary schools are classified as private. Qualitatively, it is assessed that a failed student is evident to first position holders in many developed countries.

As last but not least, teachers in Japan are largely seen as respected professionals; teaching jobs attract many college graduates because teachers have higher occupational prestige, higher salaries, and generous pensions. The average salary of teachers is 7500\$ but they required to renew their education personnel certificates every 10 years, after undergoing professional development to ensure that their skills and knowledge are up to date. This is why teaching jobs are very competitive, and only one out of every five to eight applicants will eventually become a teacher. On the other hand, their role is unusually productive; every teacher has to be a researcher besides being teacher. It means, if there are around two million teachers, there are two million researchers, as well.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.