

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



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Taliban are against Girls' Education

Amid rising insecurity, National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces foiled a planned suicide attack on a girls' school in Kabul after security forces shot and wounded the would-be suicide bomber. The shooting incident occurred in Khoshi district of central Logar province, where the would-be bomber, Bakhtullah, had plotted the attack.

According to the NDS, Bakhtullah confessed to the plot during preliminary investigations. He reportedly said he had been appointed by Rehan, a commander of Haqqani network, to carry out the bombing. He told the NDS that the plan had been to bomb a girls' school in Chahar Asiab district of Kabul.

Taliban insurgents have always been against the education of girls in Afghanistan. They have made many attempts to discourage female education. The places where they have a strong hold, Taliban never allow the females to even think of getting modern education. In certain cases, they are only allowed to get basic Arabic education, and nothing more than that.

It is unfortunate to note that it is not just Taliban who are against female education; there are many families in rural parts of the country where the education of the girls is impossible. As most of those areas are dominated by patriarchy, religious extremism and tribalism, the thoughts of the people are still very much conservative. Moreover, as per the parochial tribal norms and extremist religious beliefs women are not meant to get education. Their duties are bound to be inside the boundaries of their houses, which they do not have the right to leave in any condition except after the permission of an authoritative male member. Though there have been some improvements made to counter the traditional beliefs regarding the female education, they are mostly limited to only a couple of large cities, while most of the small cities and villages do not have proper or any arrangement for the education of women.

Moreover, the efforts that are carried out in some way or the other are not without opposition - most of the times the opposition comes in the form of ruthless violence. There have been many incidents when the lunatic culprits have thrown acids on the faces of the girls who go to schools. Poisoning of the schoolgirls has been very common. Even in the capital Kabul, there were many occasions when hundreds of school girls were poisoned through mysterious gases. In certain cases, Taliban even bombed girls' schools so as to destroy them completely. Parents, who are interested to let their girls get education, have to think thousand times because for them the lives of their children are dearer than their education. However, it should be mentioned here that this sort of incidents are really very cowardly and they depict that the culprits are not capable of attracting others towards their bogus ideas so they take the support of violence on weaker strata of society.

In fact it is not just the education of the girls that has been influenced much by the extremist and backward thinking in Afghan society; rather the whole education system has been going through difficulties. Continuous wars for decades have left Afghan society suffer in so many fields and areas and education is also one of them. Particularly, after 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 madressah 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 Islam and Islamic concepts. Investigation and research were banned strictly, and students called as Talibs 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; however, it has yet to go miles so as to reach the required destination. 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. Taliban insurgents are always seeking opportunities where they should be able to target females who pursue education and thus understand their rights and raise voice against the discrimination and violence against women.

It is important that government authorities should take strict notice of incidents that inflict or try to inflict violence against women and must try to make sure that the system treats every stratum of society, particularly the women, in accordance to the demands of justice.



It Never Rains but It Pours

By Hujjatullah Zia

The social and political challenges fill the air with a sense of disappointment. Since Afghanistan is embroiled in interminable problems, Afghans, mainly the youths, have no clear picture about their future. The gleam of hope for a better life seems to be declining. The large-scale human rights violation, unmitigated militancy, lack of job opportunities, relentless corruption in judicial system, the fall in cultural values, etc. demoralize the public.

Sob stories, violence against women, carnage and bloodbath, terrorist attacks and so on are the hackneyed phrases which make the headlines in national newspapers. We are alienating from ourselves as the overwhelming violation of rights and horror stories can no more provoke one's empathy or sympathy. When we see one dying before our eyes or our next-door neighbor is burning in fire, we ignore the incidents. We close our ears to the heart-wrenching voice of an innocent girl asking for help for being tortured in our neighbor's underground or a mother who mourns over the bloody corpse of her child. All made us stone-hearted is the shocking news being reported frequently and changed into cliché.

When we live in a society where life is cheap and streams of blood is spilt in one way or another, we will lose our concern and we are not to blame. Based on the theory of "social contract", we established a government and gave all our authorities to have our rights and freedoms protected and to be provided with facilities and social betterment in return. We have committed to live under government's authority and accept the legal punishment per law of land in case of breaking the law or overstepping from rights and liberty limited on the basis of law. During the election, we flocked to the ballot boxes to cast our votes so as to have our rights ensured through establishing a democratic administration. In another item, despite the potential threats from the militants, men and women made colorful queues before the ballot boxes, in cities and towns, with the hope to heave a sigh of relief under the shadow of democracy.

To their unmitigated chagrin, however, their dreams did not come true. With the multiple crises, the public fluctuate between fear and hope. The brain-drain that our country is wrestling with is justifiable since there is neither security nor job opportunities for the youths. Hundreds of male and female graduate from universities annually, but fail to find a job just to earn their keep. What will be the next option?

There are two options left for the jobless individuals: either to succumb to crime, as the rate of crime has mounted recently,

or take refuge to foreign countries. It is believed that the second choice is far better than the first one. If the government wants to decrease the crime rate or prevent from brain-drain, it will have to create job opportunities - this will tackle both the issues in the same time. Hence, the state is not supposed to urge foreign countries to send the refugees back since there are no job opportunities or, at least security, in the country.

Economic constraints are the main reason behind the rise in crime. Rumors say that people are being killed on streets for a very small amount of money. Those who have somewhat better life are either murdered or abducted for their money or at least live in fear. Theft, mugging and robberies have been multiplied in big cities, including Kabul, recently. It goes without saying that financial pressures and unemployment force one to commit crime as the last resort.

What needs to be recognized is that we are not in the grip of one or two problems but suffering a spate of challenges simultaneously. It is believed that since the crises are intertwined dealing with a single issue will not put an end to it. For instance, when the government combats terrorism, at the same time it needs to fight narcotic drugs and administrative corruptions. Narcotic is the mainstay of the protracted war in Afghanistan and the Taliban's bread and butter. Therefore, it will be hard for the government to bring the insurgents into their knees unless eradicate the narcotic productions. Secondly, the implementation of law is hampered by the corruption going on in judicial system. Based on a source, members of Mafia are released from prisons after greasing the palms of the responsible officials. So, when the law is implemented strictly only on the poor and the rich and the influential commit crime with impunity, the challenges will continue unabated. Kidnapping, as Mafia group is widely involved in it, smuggling drug, bribery and ultimately terrorism will continue. The crises are highly interlinked and one of them breeds the other and the next. Therefore, it is believed that sterilizing the mother will be far effective than fighting the products.

Regarding terrorism, we can simply point finger at our neighbors and the insurgents' hub outside the Afghanistan's territory, but what about the smuggling of precious stones, the production of narcotic and the corruption? Don't all the other issues demonstrate poor governance? Narcotic and Corruption, which lead to the continuation of terrorism and crime, harm our nation - if not greater - the same as terrorism does, don't they? Such questions always remain unanswered.

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Creating A Happier Workforce for Higher Productivity in Afghanistan

By Sun Xi

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Productivity isn't everything, but in the long run it is almost everything," said Paul Krugman, an eminent Nobel laureate in economics.

So far, most ways used in Afghanistan to raise productivity are conventional: capital investment, labor increment, skills training, and technological and business innovation. However, one unconventional factor has been overlooked and underestimated - the power of happiness.

Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by joy, satisfaction, contentment, enthusiasm and interest. Many psychologists have pointed out that happiness promotes the capacities of innovation, improves memory, and leads to greater altruism.

There have been clear and positive links between workers' happiness and their productivity - happiness makes workers more productive.

A recent study led by Professor Andrew Oswald, Dr. Eugenio Proto and Dr. Daniel Sgroi from the Department of Economics at the University of Warwick found that happy workers were 12 percent more productive, while unhappy workers were 10 percent less productive. The research was based on four different experiments with more than 700 participants. Based on statistics from 1994 to 2009, the Fortune's 100 best companies to work for in the United States outperformed their peer group by 2.3 percent annually. According to Professor Alex Edmans at the London Business School, this is not a correlation, but a direct causation between happier companies and shareholder returns.

The US internet giant Google/Alphabet, the most valuable company in the world and the No.1 place to work for the seven years in the past decade, is regarded as the pioneer in employee happiness.

Happy workers even make better sandwiches. The British sandwich chain Pret a Manger, which takes its employees' well-being very seriously, attributed its impressive 16 percent annual sales growth in 2014 largely to its workforce's happiness. Its staff are even given a special bonus for being happy during work.

Afghanistan, however, is known to have very unhappy workers. It could be one of the reasons for its lackluster productivity.

To boost productivity, tripartite partners (employers, workers and government) in Mongolia need to cooperate with one another closely and continuously.

First, employers are at the center of creating a happier workforce. They could follow a simple "EMOTION" approach; namely Employee engagement, Maximizing satisfaction, Op-

timizing culture, Trust building, Individualization, Opportunity creation and Non-monetary incentives.

In Google, its employees (called "Googlers") are given competitive salaries, free Wifi on shuttle transport, free ice cream and healthy snacks, free lifts to work, and the opportunity to spend 20 percent of their office time on non-work projects of "passion".

Other practical measures adopted by top companies include work-life balance, flexible hours, training opportunities, challenging assignments and clear career progression, so employees feel stretched professionally and valued personally.

Second, workers play a key role in their own happiness, since in essence, one's personal perception of their job affects satisfaction. Everyone can follow a "HAPPY" recipe; namely contributing to Harmony at workplaces, working with Appreciation, staying Positivity, pursuing your Passion, and focusing on improving Yourself instead of competing with others.

Third, the government should consider measuring happiness in the workplace and society, as only "What gets measured gets managed," in the words of Peter Drucker, the founder of modern management. In this regard, the UK could be considered a role model.

In the UK, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Well-being Economics was formed in 2009. In 2010, the National Well-being Programme was launched. Since fiscal year 2012, its annual well-being official statistics have been published. Since then, reported personal well-being in the UK has been improving and the year-on-year differences are statistically significant.

In October 2014, the What Works Centre for Well-being was set up in the UK to promote greater understanding of what government, business, communities and individuals can do to improve well-being.

A similar mechanism could be formed in Afghanistan. For a start, the government should consider officially collecting and publishing annual national statistics on workforce well-being, measuring not only overall sense of satisfaction with work but also sense of fulfillment across different occupations. To effectively use workforce well-being data, it is necessary to organize public dialogues and stakeholder engagement so as to communicate the likely impact of real policy initiatives on workplace happiness and to help employers build professional capacity so as to create the conditions for employees to work happily. So far, Afghanistan has enjoyed a certain increase in material prosperity. Perhaps it's time for the pursuit of happiness, even if it is harder to quantify. In return, a happier society will also be beneficial for grooming higher productivity in Afghanistan.

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