

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



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Emergence of Ghost Schools Amidst Negligence of Concerned Ministry

We have been narrating tales of technological progress, economic gains and educational developments the rest of the world has achieved, bidding to create an inspiration to our fate makers' so that they could steer the country on the agreeable course of sustainable success. We admit the role of quality education central to development of every country we aspire to associate with, anyway. It is believed education is one of the elements; entailing dynamic programs of socio-political and economic riches –it can only transform us from underdeveloped state into fully developed state.

The allocation of most of resources into this sector is the cognition of aforementioned reality –pleading a parallel flow of resources into the said sector. It is anticipated the government and concerned departments launches the state of emergency meant not only to increase the students' enrollment but also assures the provision of competing education. Being driven by motives of change, the government diverts every saved penny for educational excellence is day-dreaming. The level consideration levied to educational uplift depicts the stance of government which is characterized by negation, underestimation, exclusion and refutation.

Earlier the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported the alleged involvement of the officials from the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) in providing fraudulent data to donors in order to personally profit off of donations for schools. "Ministers have reported that no schools are open in the insecure parts of Afghanistan, but former officials have forged the numbers and have embezzled the money," SIGAR head John Sopko said. The elevated concerns of corresponding donor agencies are equitable stance and must be tried for reversal. Reportedly, SIGAR, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had spent 769 million USD to support education in Afghanistan since March 31, 2015.

It is heart wrenching to find education sector meagerly administered and poorly governed –the cry for lack of resources is high, however when substantiated is defrauded. Afghan education sector already suffering of poor management, is struck by sever stroke of fund misappropriation. Education sector is worst hit by meager performance –the allegation of fund embezzlement adds to its complication.

Following the SIGAR report the Officials from Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's (AIHRC) office in Ghor province have reported findings that fraudulent school statistics have allowed commanders of illegal armed groups operating in the area to embezzle millions of Afghans intended for teachers' salaries. The investigation of AIHRC officials has revealed numerous "ghost schools" in Ghor province, meaning, schools that exist on paper and receive funding, but in reality do not exist or are not operating. The funding intended for these schools is said to line the pockets of local powerbrokers and militant leaders. According to the AIHRC office in Ghor, nearly 70 percent of the province's schools are closed, and tens of local lawbreakers and illegal armed group commanders receive salaries designated for the schools' teachers.

It's outrageous to recognize the funds reserved for educational betterment in a province are flowing into the accounts of militants and local commanders who are consecutively unleashing terror plots against the innocent civilians. It is unbelievably frightening the monetary allocation for education is funding heinous crimes –education is shunned in ignorance and militancy is supported instead. Regrettably, incriminating education which undoes the fear out of the mind and heart of people is camouflaged in the constant cloud of terror and endless fear –unluckily parasitizes on its very existence. The government claiming to be ignorant of the whole state of affairs marks its in-depth negligence or criminal complicity. What about the credibility of whole statistics of ministry of education after the emergence of this report. Doesn't it reflect the statistics provided about the rest of province are also merely paper work? Will the government ensue the case of such grave fraudulence and punish the culprits devoid of their socio-political standings? There are several questions emerging in the minds of every loyal Afghan waiting to be responded –one being is how long will the masses be put to mercy of power players.

The report of fraudulence discredits our very existence as a nation, raise serious questions against our credibility and the distaste of accountability. This act of betrayal is shocking to learn when public officials side the wrongs means of exploiting the public resources –it ultimately earn us disgrace and indignity. The reprehensible act is analogous to self immolation –education fundamental to collective uplift is enrooted by cutting instead of adding the resources going to this department. The minimally performing education sector is deliberately pushed to abysmal of negation. The concerned public officials instead of choosing to resign after the news got public, shamelessly sticks to defend their ill deeds. Sticking to state of constant denial, owing the responsibility of mishaps undertaken in one's realm marks an in-depth degree of incompetence whilst negating any expectancy of betterment.

At these very dismal circumstances the government has to turn education sector into one of the well-funded sector, aiming to rid the country out of calamity of illiteracy. It is right time the government gets this sector streamlined well nurtured capable to compete with developing counties of the world. A nation reaches to prominence, turn unbeatable and matchless, only when greater intrepid steps are taken to eliminate illiteracy by declaring the state of educational emergency. The profound significance of education in societal ascend is established and undisputed, contrary to being failed to inspire our politicians.

An Alliance for Countering the Taliban Offensive

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

In response to the deteriorated security situation in the North, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, Afghanistan's first Vice President, and Atta Mohammad Noor, governor of Balkh province have formed an alliance to jointly fight the Taliban and other militant groups operating in northern Afghanistan. The two prominent figures have said their supporters would join forces to contain the Taliban's resurgence in the north and support government forces in the ongoing battle against the Taliban. The unexpected alliance is coming at a time when the Taliban and its allied militant groups are gaining ground in some northern provinces in the fight against Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In recent weeks, the ANSF has launched extensive military operations against the militants in the north to expel the Taliban's spring offensive launched this spring.

The announcement of the alliance suggests that the two leaders have rightly realized the nature of the threats posed to the Northern provinces. Gen. Dostum and Gov. Atta were bitter rivals in the past competing over the Northern provinces as their power bases. The two men also belonged to the two key rival sides of the last year controversial presidential elections, which were bitterly fought and lasted for several months.

The formation of the alliance is viewed as a significant move from the two key power brokers in boosting local resistance against the offensives from the Taliban and other militant groups. The situation in the North is critical. Many of Northern provinces that were relatively secure in the past are now scenes of intense battles between government forces and the Taliban and its affiliated groups. The shift of the insurgency to the north is attributed to presence of thousands of foreign militants in different parts of Afghanistan particularly in the north. Hundreds of foreign militants are believed to be stationed in the Northern provinces, teaming up forces with the Taliban in the fight against government forces. Many of the militants are driven out of the Taliban's safe haven in North Waziristan after Pakistan launched a military offensive in the region last year.

The northern parts of Afghanistan are viewed strategically important for not only for foreign militant groups and the newly emerging Islamic State group but also for the Taliban. The militants include Chechens, Uzbeks, Uighurs and Tajik citizens who aim to promote militancy in their own nations. The Islamic State group also attempts to expand its influence beyond Afghanistan and further to the Central Asian nations. Attempting to expand the war front and to counter influence of groups like Islamic State, the Taliban has focused on provinces like Badakhshan, Kunduz and other northern provinces. The opening of a new front in the war by the Taliban is also aimed at stretching out the government forces into many war fronts so to undermine its strength in countering the insurgency. There are also many conspiracy theories over the roles

of key regional and global players in shift of the war zone to the north of the country.

The formation of the alliance between Gen. Dostum and Gov. Atta Mohammad Noor is hugely significant in countering the Taliban offensive in the north. The two men have ultimate influence in many key Northern provinces including the most insecure provinces where the war is going on. The Northern provinces are power bases of Junbesh- Milli and Jamiat-e Islami, to which Dostum and Atta Muhammad Noor belong. Given the rising threats to the northern and central parts of Afghanistan, former members of the so-called northern alliance would be inevitably forced to make a unified stance against the Taliban and other militants and protect the people. The Taliban resurgence in the northern and central provinces cannot be countered without a significant role from the top-level political leaders in facilitating local resistances against the Taliban.

The rising threats from the militant groups in the northern and central parts of Afghanistan could be only the tip of a larger iceberg. The Islamic State group is actively recruiting and extensively expanding. So far, the Islamic State group has mainly focused on the eastern provinces, while creeping to other areas in the South and North. The Northern part of the country is believed to be a key target for the Islamic State group and other foreign jihadi groups given its vicinity to the Central Asia. The militants are attempting to create a permanent safe haven for the militant groups in the North so to be able to provide logistical support for their operations not only inside the country but also into the Central Asian nations. During his visit to Moscow, former president Hamid Karzai said that the militants aim to use the northern Afghanistan as a launch pad for extending their activities into the northern neighbors.

Whether the militant groups will be able to create a safe haven in the north or not, it is likely that the militant groups enhance their efforts for controlling key areas in the north. The multiplicity of the jihadist groups and their rising threats to the once secure areas in the country will further exacerbate security conditions in central and Northern provinces. Given the current trend of the extremist groups' recruitment and expansion, the government will not be able to diffuse the insurgency in the north in a short timeframe. In a foreseeable period of time, security threats for Northern provinces would further increase as the militants will attempt to expand their presence in these provinces. There is need for promoting local resistance against the militant groups by former jihadi groups led by key political figures loyal to the central government.

The former jihadi leaders should need to act decisively for activating local protection units aimed at supporting Afghan government forces in protecting the people. For now, the prospect of the war against the militant groups would remain uncertain for the years to come. As it is the case now, the government will inevitably need backing of local resistance units to fight against the Taliban and other militant groups. All parties including the central government and its key stakeholders need to be prepared for any unexpected situations.

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Pros and Cons of Poliovirus

By Dr. Faisal Ali

Outbreak of infantile paralysis in different ages of the history is a sheer curse leaving deep print of miseries along with evincing man's vulnerability and haplessness to give swift response. Karl Landsteiner spearheaded his research to find the causative virus of this disease in 1908. So far the Poliovirus has exposed itself in three serotypes throughout the globe inter-alia PV1, PV2 and PV3. PV1 is the most commonly encountered form and the one most closely associated with paralysis.

The virus is transmitted via the fecal-oral and oral-oral routes. The cells of the pharynx and intestinal mucosa are the first ones to be infected with poliovirus. It gains entry to the cells by binding to the poliovirus receptor (PVR) or CD155 on the surface of the cell membranes. The virus then hijacks the host cell's own machinery and begins to replicate. Poliovirus divides with in gastrointestinal cells for a week, from where it spreads to the tonsils, the intestinal lymphoid tissue including the M cells of Peyer's patches, the deep cervical and mesenteric lymph nodes. The virus is subsequently absorbed into the bloodstream and causes viremia. The virus enters the central nervous system in 1% of infections. Most patients with CNS involvement develop non paralytic aseptic meningitis with symptoms of headache, neck stiffness, abdominal and extremity pain, fever, vomiting, lethargy and irritability. About one to five in 1000 cases progress to Acute Flaccid Paralysis syndrome. Depending on the site of paralysis, Paralytic poliomyelitis is classified as spinal, bulbar or bulbospinal. The laboratory confirmation can be carried out by finding poliovirus in a stool sample and swab of the pharynx. Other investigations include serum antibodies against the poliovirus and detection of virus in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). If a poliovirus is isolated from a patient experiencing acute flaccid paralysis, it is further tested through Oligonucleotide mapping or PCR amplification to determine whether it is "wild type" or "vaccine type".

In the present age, the purgatory scenes produced by this virus can be observed in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria only. There are two types of vaccines which are used to combat poliovirus throughout the world i.e Salk vaccine or Inactivated Poliovirus Vaccine (IPV) and Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV). The first one is injectable while the later is administered orally. The benefit of IPV over OPV is that the inactivated poliovirus in IPV cannot revert to the activated form while the attenuated virus in OPV can revert to an active virus on rare occasions that can

induce paralysis. To arrest the extremities and dreads of poliovirus in the affected regions, all the wealthiest countries, global leaders and philanthropists under the aegis of World Health Organization (WHO) have to play a lead role. In this regard, two pronged strategy inter-alia short term and long term are required to be worked out for their immediate implementation. In long term, the WHO is required to sponsor research and invention of anti-poliovirus drug with creation of logistics for attending emergency in every nook and corner. For that reason, the Polio Eradication & Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018 should be implemented in full swing.

To minimize the miseries of the affected countries, certain interim measures are also required to beat the severity of the virus. In this regard, the Inactivated Poliovirus Vaccine (IPV) would be advisable to be procured to each and every health care center in the endemic regions. A paradigm of systematic administration of vitamin A during polio immunization activities should be made a prodigious affair. Alongside, the affected countries shall undertake an exercise of screening their citizens for timely deduction of the virus and isolation of the affected individuals.

Achieving the target of better treatment, various research institutes and pharmaceutical companies should be sponsored and patronized for swift invention of an antiviral which can combat poliovirus efficiently. Research is to be initiated to develop an antiviral that can interfere with the Internal Ribosome Entry Site (IRES) to prevent the translation of poliovirus RNA inside the human cells. Practical invention or discovery of a Poliovirus receptor blocker (PVR Blocker) would also minimize the invasion of this virus inside the body cells.

Lastly, efforts should be sponsored, patronized and promulgated to ferret out the true oncolytic (anti-cancer) role of PVS-RIPO which is a genetically engineered poliovirus. The PVS-RIPO is produced by inserting a portion of genetic code of rhinovirus into the poliovirus genome. This modified poliovirus has shown promising results against Glioblastoma Multiforme at the Preston Robert Tisch Brain Tumor Centre at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, United States of America (USA). The PVS-RIPO is infused into the brain tumor via a catheter which is directly inserted to the tumor using a local anesthetic. The studies are now moving in Phase 2 and 3 trials to determine effectiveness and get on track towards a hopeful FDA approval. In one of my previous articles, I had proposed the conduction of studies to discover any therapeutic role of Naegleria Fowleri in management of brain tumors. It is therefore concluded that a micro-organism known to have crippling effects on humanity may present as a cure in a modified form.

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