

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



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Corruption Devouring Aid Funds

It is now an open secret that a considerable amount of aid that flowed to Afghanistan did not reach to deserving people. The implementing organizations, personnel and officials who had the responsibility of transferring these aids into support and assistance to the poor and deprived people of Afghanistan could only manage to benefit themselves. The project-based approach towards the problems in the country and utilization of the fund on the same approach has not provided sustainable solutions. Both the organizations and personnel who implement projects have considered themselves responsible during the duration of the projects and after that they have forgotten their responsibilities.

Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation mechanism has been very weak. In most of the cases, there has not been any monitoring and evaluation of the project and in other cases when there has been any sort of monitoring or evaluation; it has been tainted by corruption.

In many cases there have been developments made only on the reporting documents. Many projects exist only on the papers, while in reality there is no activity at the project sights. These all facts have led to a situation where billions of dollars of aid have not done enough to make Afghan society solve its major issues and stand on its own.

In a current revelation, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has said that US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided "inaccurate" data about the location of nearly two dozen health facilities in Afghanistan's western zone.

SIGAR's inspection of the \$259.6 million Partnership Contracts for Health (PCH) program has found "substantial inaccuracies" in the GPS coordinates USAID provided for 23 of the 63 healthcare facilities it was funding in Herat province.

The inspection has revealed that the location of the 23 facilities were about 6 miles from the GPS coordinates provided by USAID; seven were more than three miles from the coordinates and 16 others were located less than three miles from the provided location data.

SIGAR stated that it could determine that only 19 facilities actually existed of the remaining 40 medical centers it examined. It also pointed out issues with the conditions of some of the facilities their inspection teams visited. It noted that four of the 23 clinics lacked water or electricity.

The watchdog however could not visit remaining facilities due to "security conditions." The condition of those facilities would definitely be worse than the ones that were inspected as they cannot be easily monitored.

After the end of Taliban regime, there were hopes that Afghanistan would be able to move towards betterment. The extremist and repressive government of Taliban would be replaced with a modern and welfare-seeking one. The war torn country would be able to have some time in reconstruction process and the people of Afghanistan would be able to have a life wherein they would be able to have a sigh of relief and definitely their basic rights. The opportunity was great as well, as the international community started assisting the country militarily, technically and above all financially. Billions of Dollars poured in the country for both military support and development projects. But if we analyze the socio-political and socio-economic scenario in the country the development does not seem as great as it should have been. Most of these aids were devoured by corruption instead of being spent for the intended purposes as mentioned in the case above.

Today, corruption has penetrated into our social behavior. It is now a part of routine life to be corrupt. From a very minor to the most major matter, we find corruption ruling the roost.

One of the major problems in tackling with corruption in our country is that the controlling mechanism itself is involved in it. The government that should be on the forefront to curb this menace, itself has been a major contributor in this regard. There have been many major occasions of corruption when current administration has been blamed for being directly involved in the matter. On most of the occasions the government has blamed the Western supporters to be generating corruption in the country. Western allies, on the other hand, have kept on insisting that Afghan authorities must carry out serious measures to curb the overgrowing corruption; however, the outcome is yet to be produced in this regard. The Western allies have spent billions of dollars in supporting the Afghan government and people but the outcomes have not been satisfactory as they have not been very much careful in this regard. And already much of the money has been misused by corruption.

Nevertheless, in the process, the supporters of Afghanistan have lost their trust from the Afghan authorities and are mostly disappointed from what has been achieved after more than a decade of expenditure and hard work. Corruption in Afghanistan is now a complex phenomenon that requires extensive efforts from both national and international authorities to be comprehended and resolved. Definitely, the anti-corruption institutions, equipped with authority and facilities can be major contributors in curbing it and Afghan government needs to support them appropriately.

International community on other hand must also ensure that the aid that they provide through different NGO's should not be misused. There should be strong control and monitoring mechanism and it should be made sure that the aid money must reach the needy and deserving people of Afghanistan; otherwise, the aid would further deteriorate Afghan society instead of doing it any good.

Russia Growing Muscles in Middle East

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

After nearly a month of conducting daily air strikes, Russia is beginning to reveal its political calculations and strategic intent in Syria. A new round of talks in Vienna on a political solution for Syrian conflict is being conducted in which Russia is about to play a major role. There is a growing sense in Moscow, and among diplomats and politicians in some countries in the Middle East and the West, that Russia has a better chance than most to combine its increased influence over Syrian President Bashar al Assad with its military muscle in Syria's skies to broker a deal to end the Syrian conflict. Hard reality is that right now Russia has more chances than any other country to settle the political process for Syrian conflict. But it's not about Syria only Russia has big ambitions in whole Middle East and entering into the Syrian bloody war on the side of Bashar Al Assad was just a small part in Russia's new grand strategy for Middle East. Since long Russia was frustrated with America's strategic dominance over the region. To establish Kremlin also as a potent force in the region President Putin choose Syrian theatre to show his muscles. The Obama administration has been weak and passive in the face of Russian intervention, basically allowing Russia to set the terms of proposed solution. Now Russia step by step is increasing its influence in the whole region by forging alliance with every important player in the regional arena. Let's have a look at some recent alliances Russian have made in the region.

Israel

Israel has discovered Russia and its growing sphere of influence in the region and that realization is what sent Netanyahu to Putin a month ago and brought about the visits of high ranking Russian army officers to Israel. It looks as though Israel does not want to be left outside the equation now that Russia is becoming increasingly involved in Syria, especially since Iran is solidly placed on the other side of the equation. That's why Israelis have set up a joint mechanism with Russian.

Iraq

Iraqi government apparently believing it wasn't receiving adequate assistance from the United States and European Union to ward off the Islamic State (IS). Has turned to Mos-

cow for support. Now Iraq is receiving Russian assistance under an intelligence and security cooperation agreement. Egypt

The Arab world's most populous country, is actually supporting Russia's actions, notwithstanding the fact that Saudi Arabia is Egypt's top paymaster. The reality is that, although most Arabs don't like what Russia is doing in their region, they do admire the way Mr Putin seems able to prick the Americans. Egypt has sought Russian military assistance after being turned down by United States.

Iran

Syria civil war has dramatically improved ties between Russia and Iran. It could laid a foundation stone of Russian-Iranian lasting ties in the region. Tehran also sees Moscow's resurgence as an opportunity to ensure its own lasting influence in the region. Iran has been at odds with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which along with other Arab countries, is concerned about Iran outreach.

But by returning with military force in the region, Russia has acquired some Middle Eastern enemies as well. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are furious with Mr Putin, largely because Russia's intervention now complicates both these countries' strategic objectives in the region.

But Turkey needs Russia more than Russia needs Turkey, and Mr Erdogan is only too aware that all the Russians need to do is to start supporting the Kurds in Syria to make Turkey's strategic situation a misery. The Saudis have also been muted in their criticism, because they too hope for an accommodation with Russia.

So in that way Russian have neutralise its critics in the region. But one important thing which Russians have overlooked in this power play is that by entering the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts with its own troops and advisers, Russia is adding fuel to the lure of jihadism rather than tamping it. Dozens of Saudi clerics are already reportedly issuing edicts for to fulfil jihad, a pillar of Islam, by fighting not only Alawites and Shiites but Russians as heathens just as they did successfully in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Russians should not desire the repeat of Afghan jihad in which it bled a lot and left the Afghanistan in disgrace.

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Sectarianism Persists in Pakistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

Sectarianism holds strong sway in Pakistan and the minority ethnic groups suffer severe violence. According to reports, a suicide attacker blew himself up on October 23 in a Muharram procession in the Jacobabad district in Sindh, killing 24 people, mostly children. More than 40 people were injured in the explosion.

It came as a day earlier, 11 people were killed and a dozen others were wounded in a similar attack outside a Shia mosque in Balochistan's Bolan district.

It is said that the Shia mourning procession was on its way back in the city's Lashari Mohalla neighborhood when it was targeted. "There were pieces of human flesh lying everywhere at the site," a Pakistani reporter is quoted as saying. Reportedly, a power breakdown that followed made it worse for the survivors. The nearby government hospital was understaffed that day, and some of the wounded died because they could not be given immediate medical care.

It was reported that Jundullah, a splinter group of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that declared allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) group last year, has claimed the responsibility for the attack. However, Sindh Home Minister Suhail Anwar Siyal said that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) has claimed responsibility.

Lack of religious tolerance has triggered violence and hatred in Pakistan. The ethnic minority groups are unable to celebrate formal ceremonies or religious rituals in a secure environment. The Shia minority groups suffer the bulk of the violence and no Muharram ceremony passes without human casualties - especially in major cities.

In short, the active presence of multi-extremist groups has narrowed the air for religious minorities.

It is self-explanatory that Madrasahs are used as a safe haven for religious extremists - who brainwash children and organize terrorist attacks.

The political parties, who operate under the name of religion, employ a number of teenagers from the poverty-stricken families and train them as a vehicle for their political interests. Hence, it is widely believed that Madrasahs are a hotbed for fundamental ideology and sectarianism.

The fundamental groups have constantly sparked sectarianism in different parts of Pakistan, which has created a great challenge for the government. Currently, tackling sectarian violence and extending religious tolerance is the biggest challenge for the Pakistan government. Since the minority groups have changed into sacrificial lambs and lose their lives flagrantly, the wall of mistrust has reached high among the nations. Human rights are violated to a large extent under the watch of government officials. One's blood is shed in a mosque, in a mourning procession, in a church, on the street, in a supermarket, etc. for following a certain belief. The nar-

sisistic mindsets of the extremist groups are the very reason behind sectarianism.

The emergence of the Islamic State (IS) groups will further fan religious tensions. It is believed that members of some warring parties have also pledged allegiance to the self-styled IS group - which paves the way for its stronger foothold. Since the main reason behind IS's existence is to usher in religious wars in Islamic countries, their emergence, without disputes, will deteriorate the security situation in any countries, including Pakistan.

The religious phobia is widely spread across the Islamic countries, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. The Islamic radicals carry out deadly acts of terror which lead to the death of many Muslims including women and children. Their dogmatic ideology considers others heretic; therefore, they compete in murdering innocent humans without an iota of mercy. Hence, the religious hardliners shake hands with none. This is, indeed, a great tragedy in Islamic world.

History shows that violence and bloodshed on the basis of religious beliefs will only lead to casualties and ravages. Shedding one's blood for a particular ideology will foment trouble in a community rather than ending the issue. Crusading against one's religious convictions has shown its ugliest face throughout the history. Historical bloodbath over religious beliefs left heavy casualties behind without a positive change. No doubt, the more a conflict continues the more it will lead to destructions.

To counter terrorism and curb religious tensions, it would be the best way for Pakistan to root out the hotbeds of fundamental ideologies and shut the doors of those Madrasahs who preach hatred- which spew forth venom and hatred for perishing innocent human beings. In another item, the government should root out the main factors of terrorism rather than battling against the sub-branches. The activities of educational centers and text books have to be monitored carefully and reformed effectively.

The Islamic countries have to learn from the checkered history of human societies and value the rights and dignity of one another. It is aptly stated in the preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights as, "...Contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people".

Considering one's rights and dignity on the grounds of race, color, beliefs, etc. will spark tensions among the nations and will inflict incurable wounds in the hearts of human societies.

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