

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



October 01, 2015

The Kunduz Assault

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are in fierce battle to take back the control of Kunduz from Taliban who had gained control of the city a couple of days earlier. They, in a shocking attack, made the security forces flee the city and took the control of major buildings and facilities. They are still believed to have the control and may give Afghan security forces a tough before they are able to take the city back.

ANSF was supported by the US-led coalition forces that carried out air strikes which are believed to have killed scores of Taliban fighters. U.S defense department in a statement announced air strikes are helping to eliminate Taliban members controlling Kunduz, adding that the strikes also targeted a Taliban gathering inside government facilities and those looting properties.

However, the Taliban carried out more assaults on Wednesday targeting ANSF forces deployed around Kunduz airport in an attempt to gain more strategic locations. But the Taliban was thwarted after US-led coalition troops bombed their positions.

It is expected that ANSF will be able to gain the control of the city within a couple of days, but the main question still remains unanswered and that is, "How could Taliban carry out such a threatening attack and take control of entire city within just one day?" This question further raises doubts about the capabilities of Afghan security forces and the government to tackle Taliban insurgents properly. There are fears that more cities may fall to Taliban if the capability and readiness of the government and the forces remain the same.

Afghan legislators in parliament on Wednesday also warned of the collapse of more cities unless so-called spies - or fifth pillar elements within government - are rooted out immediately. They also accused the National Unity Government (NUG) of being "incompetent" and failing to protect and preserve national interests. They suggested the establishment of a defense council and the transfer authority currently held by the National Security Council to such a body. They also suggested that some government leaders have to be brought to book in the wake of deteriorating security in a number of provinces in recent months.

This is really important that NUG takes notice of deteriorating situation before it is too late. People are really worried about their lives and their future; they have every right to be provided a secure and peaceful life and the government is totally responsible for providing them this right. They are rightly fearful of the security situation as they are mostly the ones who have been influenced largely by instability and terrorism prevailing in the country. It is, no doubt, tragic to see the civilians losing their lives when they are not a participant in it. In like Afghanistan that has been hit by war and economic instability, people have not only suffered the hardships of destitution and miseries but also the horrors of war. They have been killed cruelly as though their lives do not have any worth or values and it is imperative to note that the Taliban are mostly behind the killings of the poor civilians and they still remain powerful enough to carry out their merciless efforts to target the civilians.

Different assaults, horrifying bombings, indiscriminate shootings and suicide bombings of the vicious guardians of the so-called holy war have, on different occasions, targeted the children, women and non-military people. Given that such facts prevail, it is strange to find Taliban calling themselves friendly to Afghan people. They have been striving hard to create an image of caring and affectionate group that is trying to emancipate the people of Afghanistan from the Western forces but the fact is just on the contrary. They just want power and control and for that they will never hesitate to sacrifice the poor Afghan people. If they come to power, it is clear that Afghan people will never enjoy tranquility, contentment and above all their due rights.

With the current rise in terrorism, it should not be forgotten that Taliban have been able to grow largely in the recent few years. The transition period, instead of assisting us in moving towards progress and improvement, seems to be taking us the other way. In fact, the overall process of transition does not seem to be going well. This period does not have to be only a transfer of security responsibility from international forces to Afghan forces, rather it should include within its folds the overall political and economic stability, wellbeing and better life opportunities for all the Afghan people. It is really vital that the post transition period in Afghanistan is a period that can give poverty and war stricken Afghan people their basic rights, provide them better representation and participation in political and social lives and make them capable of governing themselves appropriately.



International Day of Older Persons (1 October)

Turning grey into gold

By Shamshad Akhtar

Just a few decades ago, the population of the Asia-Pacific region was dominated by the young. Now, as birth rates have dropped and life expectancies improved, the population is aging. Twelve per cent of our people in the region are already over the age of 60.

By 2050, this figure will rise to one quarter of the whole population. Never before have countries aged as rapidly. It took France 115 years and Sweden 85 years to become aged societies, but for Vietnam and Thailand, it will take only 20-22 years. The region risks getting old before it gets rich. So how do we address this crisis of a rapidly aging population in our region?

It is clear that the demographic window of opportunity for the region, which opened with a surge in the working-age population, is closing. Take China for example: 67 per cent of its population is of working age today - but this has started to change. Forty years from now, this will have shrunk to only half, with almost one third of the entire Chinese population older than 65.

Does this mean that our region will inevitably lose its economic dynamism? Not necessarily - if we prepare properly, and act now. The International Day of Older Persons, celebrated on 1 October every year, provides us with a good opportunity to reflect on how best to prepare for these new challenges and opportunities.

There is still ample scope to increase labour force participation, even as working-age populations decline. In many countries across the region, large proportions of the population, especially women, remain excluded from labour markets. For example in the Republic of Korea, only 56 per cent of women of working age participate in the labour force, and in South Asia, less than a third do. Going forward, countries will have to adopt more active policies to encourage and enable women's labour force participation.

Countries with an increasingly aged population might also consider policies attracting orderly and reliable international migration as an additional option to address key potential labour shortages. Another key element which must be addressed to sustain economic growth is to increase productivity. When countries age, their economic structure should move from labour-in-

tensive industries to more technology-oriented ones. This entails improving the quality of education and promoting technological upgrades and their wide-spread adoption.

We also need a new system of intergenerational solidarity. In the traditional system, older persons were looked after by their children.

But these traditional systems are breaking up as a result of increasing industrialization, increased women's labour force participation and rural to urban migration. However, we can turn these changes into another opportunity. We can turn population ageing into a second demographic dividend, with financially-secure, healthy older persons, empowered to focus their decades of accumulated experience, wisdom and wealth to stimulate new economic growth. The specific needs of older persons can also spur innovation and demand for new products, as well as creating job opportunities in care industries. This will only work however, if we act now to ensure that older persons are provided with the means and opportunities to contribute to society. Currently, only about 26 per cent of working-age people in the region contribute to pension schemes. We need to further develop pension systems to increase savings and to sustain domestic demand. We also need to introduce principles of solidarity into pension systems, and especially address the needs of women. Population ageing plans must be at the centre of development, not an afterthought, and the time to act is now. Comprehensive policies, developed and implemented in collaboration with older persons, are urgently needed.

With the right preparation, we can benefit from a golden generation of healthy, wealthy and active older persons. In 2002, the United Nations brought countries together in Madrid to agree on a global way forward: to treat older persons as actors of development; to ensure their health and wellbeing; and to create enabling and supportive environments for them. In the new sustainable development agenda, adopted last week, older persons have a role to play in almost each of the new goals. The United Nations stands ready to support countries to put these plans into action, and to secure future societies for all ages in Asia and the Pacific.

The author is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). She is also the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and Vice President of the MENA Region of the World Bank

Insecurity Persists

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the declaration of spring offensive, the Taliban insurgents make heavy inroads into Afghanistan - which undermine the nascent democracy and sow the seeds of mistrust between state and nation. The graph of civilian casualties has increased dramatically. Similarly, the nation's dream for a society void of violence and bloodshed did not come true. Hence, a large number of people leave the country, as a last resort, to flee war and political instability.

As a result, total civilian deaths and injuries in the first quarter of 2015 followed the record high levels of 2014. Between January 01 and March 31, UNAMA documented 1,810 civilian casualties, a two per cent decrease from the same period in 2014.

The election of new President in April 2014 had ushered in a lot of optimism among the people as well as the international community. It was hoped that Afghanistan would now move on to a path of peace and stability. But now, such hopes have faded away and Afghanistan seems to be going back to the quagmire of violence, as well as economic instability. According to a list compiled by a watchdog website Sadroz.af, Afghan President made 13 promises for the peace and security sector, 20 promises for the governance sector, and 29 promises for the socio-cultural sector. However, he had filled only 4 of the promises till date.

"The law and order situation of the country is a constant state of decline. The Taliban in the far flung areas of Farah, Kunduz and Badakhshan have already mounted a new spring offensive and are consolidating their positions in the areas that are far from Kabul. Insecurity has significantly increased throughout the country, civilian deaths have shot up, and the Afghan security forces are taking large, and potentially unsustainable, casualties. The Afghan forces also suffer from financial problems and deficiencies in logistics, intelligence resources, and special support functions, including medical evacuation."

The security situation in the country is declining with each passing day. As a result, a large number of prisoners, mainly Taliban, escaped from two prisons within a month. Reportedly, more than 350 inmates have escaped after an attack by Afghan Taliban insurgents on the main prison in eastern Ghazni province. Similarly, the Taliban insurgents broke into the main prison in Kunduz city on Monday and freed more than six hundred prisoners; hours after militants captured Kunduz Province. Afghan MPs claim that three hundred Taliban fighters were among the released prisoners however security officials say that only one hundred and ten were members of the Taliban group. Mullah Akhtar Mansour intensified deadly attacks from the first day of being appointed as Omar's successor and declared peace process as "enemy propaganda". The peace negotiation

between Taliban and Afghan officials was stalled with the revelation of Omar's death and Mansour wore the face of more radical character through launching heavy attacks to gain the support of opposing group. The rift between Omar's family and Mullah Mansour, over his succession, was bridged in recent times. However, Mullah Mansour Dadullah, the Taliban's commander, has not pledged allegiance to Akhtar Mansour and charged him as the yes-man of Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI).

Moreover, Afghan officials also believe that Pakistan is still a safe haven for the Taliban insurgents and they organize their attacks there and cross the porous border to undermine the security situation. Speaking at the 70th United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive Officer, said the Haqqani network had been identified as a main culprit and needed to be dismantled as had been Afghanistan demand in the past. "Our demands are legitimate as our people continue to suffer at the hands of terrorist elements who cross into Afghanistan and indiscriminately victimize our citizens. This matter needs to be addressed and facilitated by trusted international partners," Abdullah is cited as saying. "We call on Pakistan to do what its leadership promised to us a few months ago when they agreed to crack down on known terror outfits - meaning the enemies of Afghanistan." He also pointed out that hundreds of militants, including foreign fighters, organized attacks in Kunduz province, where heavy fighting is going on between US led security forces and Taliban. The attacks came a day after more than 10 spectators at a sport match were killed and many more injured in southeastern Paktika province in a bomb attack.

The Afghan-Pak relation soured when the Taliban insurgents carried out a fatal attack on Shah Shaheed Mosque in Kabul on August 7th which left dozens dead and wounded behind. Following the attack, Afghan President aired outspokenly as, "Pakistan still remains the venue and ground for gatherings from which mercenaries send us a message of war." He added that at the time Pakistan President Nawaz Sharif said the enemies of Afghanistan are the enemies of Pakistan, "now the time has come for him to prove it."

Despite all the blame game, Pakistani officials insist on resuming peace talk - which has been proved futile from the time of Karzai's presidency until date. And I believe that it will never bear the desired fruit.

The unmitigated militancy, which leads to combatant and non-combatant casualties, makes a wall of mistrust between state and nation. Undergoing war and violence, a large number of Afghan people flee the country - this reflects the government's failure and insufficiency. Ill-fatedly, our nation's bleeding wounds seem to be festering despite the democratic system.

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