**No change**

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The much-vaunted change in the attitude of the so-called reformed Afghan Taliban seems to be non-existent. From southern parts of Afghanistan to remote regions of the north, the Taliban are implementing their harsh interpretation of religion. On the other hand, the policy of celebrating their victory and creating euphoria over their takeover seems to be boomeranging on their supporters.

The group with its conservative outlook is creating problems not only for the people of Afghanistan, but also for all those who wish to see change in their attitude that could help them earn legitimacy and the much-need recognition.

But it seems that the ranks of the Taliban are brimming with retrogressive elements who do not want to have any interaction with the international community. They seem to have sheer contempt for the modern state system and the rule-based global order that oblige states to accept certain international norms.

Unfortunately, this is a recipe for disaster for a majority of Afghans who want to receive modern education and respect the norms and tradition they are taught besides benefitting from the cooperation with the international community. One way to benefit from global institutions is to respect the conventions regarding human rights and governance, but the Taliban are turning a blind eye to the demands of the international community for the implementation of the same.

Taliban leaders have hinted at reviving the system of harsh punishments. Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, one of the founders of the Taliban, has expressed that the group is not ready to be flexible on this issue. In a recent interview with an American news agency, he said that punishments like the amputation of thieves’ hands and executions of murderers would be practised again in the war-torn country. This has alarmed rights activists, but the Taliban are less worried about such outcry.

This is not only the opinion of one Talib, but a number of Taliban leaders have made similar statements that have not gone down well with human rights activists and the international community. Another Taliban leader Sayed Zekrullah Hashimi, in an interview to TOLO News, said, “A woman can’t be a minister, it is like you put something on her neck that she can’t carry.” He went on to say that “it is not necessary for a woman to be in the cabinet”. No one from the Kabul administration refuted this statement, creating suspicions that it is not only one or two leaders, but the entire leadership which is backing this anti-women attitude.

The appointment of a top official in Kabul University also reflects the priority of the Taliban. The Kabul government has replaced a highly educated vice chancellor, Muhammad Osman Baburi, who is a PhD degree holder and has vast experience of teaching and research. He has been replaced with Mohammad Ashraf Ghairat who is a bachelor’s degree holder and has no experience of running a university.

The new chancellor has hinted at waging war against obscenity instead of coming up with a plan to turn the university into one of the best in the region. Around 70 staff members and teachers are believed to have quit their jobs to protest the appointment, causing more brain drain in the country that has already witnessed the fleeing of educated and skilled people in recent months.

The decision of the government to bar girls from attending schools, albeit temporarily, has also endorsed the claims of those who asserted that the group would never change. The segregation at education institutions is also under fire with many critics questioning the rationale of this decision, asserting that the country does not have enough men and women teachers to meet the demands of segregation.

The faltering economy does not permit private education institutions to recruit teachers and other staff members on a massive scale. If segregation is turning out to be an uphill task at universities and colleges, how could it be implemented at secondary schools which outnumber colleges and universities? Many argue that instead of concentrating on the issue of segregation, the Taliban should have carried out a comprehensive study probing into the lack of facilities in education institutions.

The reports of vindictive actions by local Taliban commanders in various parts of the country also fly in the face of their claims that they would not take revenge from former government officials. There have been reports in recent days in the international media claiming that former officials and personnel of the Ghani regime are being asked to hand over their houses and property to the Taliban. The Hazaras and other ethnic minorities are also complaining of discrimination. Such attitude would only fuel resentment, strengthening the hands of those who wish to see turmoil in the war-torn country.

Despite all this, there is no moral or legal justification for the US for freezing assets worth $9 billion of the Afghan government. These assets belong to the Afghan people and must be released. If the US believes that its actions will help the Afghans, it is mistaken. Its crippling policy of sanctions on Iraq led to the deaths of over 500,000 Iraqi children. Its inhumane restrictions on Cuba and North Korea also caused immense hardships for ordinary people. Washington’s policy of strangulating Iranian and Venezuelan economies is a recipe of disaster not for the ruling elites of the two countries, but for the people.

Therefore, freezing assets does not make any sense. Economic hardships would prompt people to take to the streets, and the Taliban, with no economic expertise, will try to brutally suppress this resistance, creating more acrimony between the various sections of Afghan society. They would try to establish a ‘graveyard of peace’ in the country as they did during their harsh rule of 1996-2001.

The international community should use any assistance as leverage to ask the Kabul regime to allow girls’ education, let women work and help the over 2.5 million Afghan widows to earn their livelihood instead of begging on roads of Kabul and other urban areas. They must seek assurances regarding the inclusion of women in the cabinet and other public offices, besides seeking a complete timetable for holding fair and transparent elections.

It is not the duty of only the international community to make the Taliban respect global norms; regional countries, which have suffered a lot because of turmoil in the war-torn state, should also spring into action and convince the Taliban to give up their narrow worldview. The Kabul administration needs to understand that an entire generation has grown up during the last two decades and witnessed a modicum of freedom which it will not sacrifice. Any movement could turn into a strong resistance that might challenge the Taliban rule.

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