**Plight of the Afghans**

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After the change of regime in Afghanistan several debates have started regarding the legitimacy of the Taliban and the looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Tragically, amid these debates and the confusion of legitimacy of the Taliban by the international community, the ordinary Afghans living in Afghanistan are adversely affected.

Life for the common Afghans has changed drastically – it doesn’t look anything like ‘freedom from the shackles of Western slavery’. According to a recent UNDP survey, 97 percent of Afghanistan’s population could sink below the poverty line if the international community does not take any concrete steps to help Afghanistan in these hard times.

Being from the borderlands myself, I had the opportunity to interact with some ordinary Afghans living in Afghanistan. All of them acknowledged that despite being a West-reliant government, with severe limitations of corruption and dysfunctional violence, it was still a functioning state.

A businessman from Jalalabad disclosed that unemployment has tripled, saying that one of the major Pul Charkhi industrial parks of Kabul, which had three thousand factories with one million workers along with engineers, office staff, can now only retain 30,000 workers. The numbers keep dropping every day. According to this gentleman, people are just waiting for either the government to change, or the US or Western powers to find some ways to facilitate the Taliban, which they had promised under the Doha deal.

Here the important question is whether the Taliban will be ready to abide by their side of the Doha deal to ease their nation’s pain.

An Afghan from senior management who was a part of the previous government’s administration tells me the present regime has not allowed anyone from the previous government; even the technical staff working with them are facing several difficulties.

An ex-employee of the Afghanistan National Standard Authority (ANSA) criticised the Taliban for their rogue behaviour towards skilled and educated workers, and says that many are being punished for working with the previous government.

There have been verbal reports that many government employees are waiting for their salaries for the past three months including teachers in different public universities. They have been notified that they are not allowed to teach in private universities, and the logic behind this restriction from the Taliban is that professors can learn from our 20 years of experiences of how to make sacrifices for the state.

The Taliban have a country to run, and this does not look like the blueprint of running the state or fixing the previous corrupt government. While the world community looks on closely, the Taliban are not following the Doha deal and are instead affecting the machinery and service delivery of the state by their exclusivist policies.

The new Taliban are just like the old Taliban when it comes to art and culture. The nephew of Ustad Rahim Baksh, the best classical singer of all times, Naseem Baksh, had to abandon his tabla playing, and has a small kiosk in the famous street of Kochay Kharabat Kabul.

So, while some people are fleeing Afghanistan because of economic hardships, some are fleeing because the state has harsh penalties for them if they pursue what they want to be doing. Naseem Baksh says the Taliban should tell the people what they can do or maybe help them escape from their own homes and lands.

Unemployment, economic hardships, and the prices of basic commodities have skyrocketed. Kanni Wignaraja of the UNDP says: “We have not seen this level of near-universal poverty in any country in recent history”.

It is ironic that the West gave legitimacy to the Taliban under the Doha accord and let them become the de-facto government of Afghanistan but have turned away from the people. The fact remains that it is only the people of Afghanistan who will suffer, and the Taliban will continue to find a way to survive as they did in the past.

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