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Afghanistan, a Country Teetering on the Edge of Collapse under Taliban's Reign of Brutality - The World a Silent Witness

After the collapse of the corrupt republic system in Afghanistan on the 15 August 2021, and the installation of Taliban by the US and Pakistan in power, a profound economic crisis emerged in the country. According to some analysts the crisis exacerbated by the abrupt cessation of a substantial portion of international aid, which had previously constituted approximately 75% of Afghanistan's budget. In my view, it is not true. The Afghan economy was not solely founded on international aid and drug trafficking by foreign and internal drug mafia. Data released by media shows that the immediate halt of aid led to a drastic 20.7% decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, resulting in widespread job losses and a significant rise in economic hardship. Adding to the predicament, around seven billion dollars of Afghanistan's funds were frozen in foreign banks, rendering many banks incapable of meeting their customers' demands. Consequently, the loss of jobs and international assistance resulted in a surge in poverty, effectively transforming Afghanistan's crisis from a political one into an economic catastrophe.

Since the power shift to Taliban, the nation has witnessed unprecedent levels of poverty, unemployment, and economic deterioration in Afghanistan, rendering

the humanitarian situation to a primary concern for numerous international relief organizations. *Islamic Relief UK* in recent past reported a harrowing 40% food poverty rate among millions of Afghan people as a direct consequence of the economic collapse during the chaotic Taliban rule. More shockingly, statistics indicate that over 29 million people, constituting roughly three-quarters of the country's population are now in dire need of humanitarian aid from international agencies. Afghanistan is grappling with severe poverty which in turn has been aggravated by a fragile economy, drought and climate changes. Thousands of Afghans have lost their means of livelihood under the atrocious Taliban control. Factors such as these have led to the intensification of these conditions under the Taliban mismanagement and totalitarian administration. To make matters worse, international assistance is not fairly distributed among the poor people. The aids, instead, are allocated to the Taliban militia to oil their administrative machinery.

By April 2023, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had reported a continuing decline in Afghanistan's economic production, with a decline of 20.7%. Disturbingly, it was revealed that 85% of the population lives below the poverty line, and a staggering 95% of the people are at risk of facing food insecurity. More disturbing still, UNICEF reported that around 16 million Afghan children lack access to basic food and medical care. This economic crisis has given rise to horrifying outcomes, including forced child marriages, economic and sexual exploitation, child trafficking, child labour, smuggling, and perilous people smuggling enterprises. Since the reinduction of Taliban in Afghanistan, international attention too has turned away from the plight of the Afghan people and the nation's dire socio-economic circumstances.

Ironically, the repressive policies imposed by the Taliban have further exacerbated economic hardships. In February 2023, UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bent, while assessing the human rights situation in Afghanistan, drew attention to the Taliban's governance characterized by fear and oppressive measures, with a particular focus on the plight of women. This underscores the extent to which the Taliban has solidified their power and enforced extremist ideology during the two years following the fall of Kabul and its takeover of Afghanistan.

However, certain pro-Taliban organizations, such as the ISI of Pakistan, have chosen to turn a blind eye to the Taliban's economic, social and educational mismanagement. They chose to remain conspicuously silent about the ongoing risk of increased poverty. Afghanistan's economy currently hangs in a delicate balance leaving a substantial portion of its population impoverished, hungry, and dependent on foreign aid. Furthermore, the emergence of new opposition forces poses a palpable threat to further economic decline. The potential for a precipitous economic collapse, a concern that loomed large in the initial months following

the Taliban takeover, remains contingent upon several factors. These include the extent of aid reduction, gradual decreases or the rigorous enforcement of unnecessary restrictions, increased taxes on farmers. It remains to be seen whether the Taliban's gender restrictions will intensify, remain unchanged, or be relaxed.

During this September, 61 people were killed by the Taliban in the name of 'unrecognised armed men'. Taliban are involved in killing many former Government's military personnel. For an example, a Taliban member by the name of Moulavi Fazel Min-Allah, AKA, Jamjuq from Aghblag village of Kolfgan district, killed a former Afghan military man and coerced the wife and twelve year old daughter of the slain soldier into sexual relationship with him. In another instance, on 20 September 2023, two Hazaras, a father and son, passing by in a public place in Uruzgan Khas province were 'arrested' by Taliban men and hacked to death. Therefore, the situation in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover is profoundly disconcerting and necessitates immediate attention from the international community. Seventeen Hazaras have been killed so far in this province. The images of the killings circulating in the media are shockingly horrific. And, Mohammed Akbari, a Taliban member callously defended such killings calling them acts of Jihad in the cause of Islam. Tragically the world community continues to remain a mute spectator.

But not all are silent witnesses. According to Mr. Ahmed Saeedi, a former Afghan diplomat, the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly concluded without Afghanistan's representation as a sovereign nation. He expressed profound sorrow, stating, "My heart aches not only for my own limitations but also for the limitations imposed upon my homeland. Regrettably, there was little else I could have done."

Saeedi went on to say, "While I have listened to the speeches of world leaders, my duty is to present the stark realities. The people of Afghanistan must be made aware that our nation finds itself on the very edge, and in the current global climate, it seems that few are willing to empathize with Afghanistan's plight or heed its calls for attention." He also emphatically referred to the persistence of a complex geopolitical game occurring within Afghanistan which I will discuss in my next article.

He noted that the United States is strategically employing regional actors such as Qatar and Turkey to counterbalance the growing influence of China and Russia in the region. The U.S. is actively working to impede the realization of the Silk Road initiative and China's ventures of substantial investments in Afghanistan's mineral resources. Furthermore, India is apprehensive about the presence of the Taliban in Pakistan, given its existing challenges related to jihadist activities in

Kashmir. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, preoccupied with its involvement in Yemen's conflict is wary of Iran's expanding influence within certain Afghan regions.

Saeedi highlighted the pervasive fear among Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours regarding the potential transformation of ISIS into a significant force in northern Afghanistan. He pointed out that thousands of militants, sympathetic to ISIS-Khorasan, are currently stationed in the Pamir and Hindu Kush regions.

It is a matter of deep concern that Afghanistan finds itself ensnared in a complex web of conflicting interests among competing nations, resulting in an uncertain and challenging future. The recent attacks by the Pakistani Taliban indicate the likelihood of continued warfare in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the Afghan populace tragically bearing the brunt of this protracted conflict.

Beyond their harsh treatment of women and girls, the Taliban's oppression extends to various ethnic groups, subjecting them to oppression. Taliban's persecution includes a systematic campaign against individuals who previously served in both military and civilian capacities within Afghanistan's former Republic government. Notably, this campaign targets hundreds of young people hailing from northern regions, particularly those belonging to the Tajik ethnic group, with a significant representation from Panjshir province. These individuals find themselves unjustly incarcerated in Taliban prisons, where they endure inhumane torture and long-term imprisonment.

Some of the above stated facts are based on eye witness accounts from Afghanistan. And referring to various news outlets, reports from international organisations, the UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ICRC, WFP, WHO, UNDP and UNICEF will be useful in understanding the credibility of the matters discussed in this article.