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The miseries and troubles of Pakhtuns

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One of the bravest nations, Pakhtuns are spread on the world's most difficult terrains comprising around 1,500 kilometres of area between the porous border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Those settled in Pakistan are called Lur (lower) Pakhtunkhwa and those who live in Afghanistan are called Bar (upper) Pakhtunkhwa.

It is the world's largest tribal system. They have social customs called Pakhtunwali, under which they lived a peaceful life for centuries before annexation of their land to Pakistan and Afghanistan. There was peace, unity, prosperity and rule of law at that time because the principles of Pakhtunwali such as generosity, hospitality, respect and honour governed the society.

But the Russian invasion of Afghanistan changed the very structure of their social system as insecurity, uncertainty and lawlessness took over the society. Before the Russian incursion, there were neither crimes nor fighting among Pukhtuns. The US-sponsored Afghan jihad, Taliban movements and the so-called war on terror dragged them into troubles and major challenges. Later, in 2002 America and former president Pervaiz Musharraf engaged the nation in the war on terror that created different warring factions. The war has given rise to a wave of fear, uncertainty and insecurity among the people. Bomb blasts and suicide attacks have rocked Peshawar, Swat valley and the tribal agencies. The war has so far claimed 45,000 lives, countless children have become orphans and many women have lost their husbands. Similarly millions of

people have fled their homes. Business activities have become paralyzed and life has become difficult. All cultural activities are at a standstill in the area.

The traditional hujra, which was a training centre for youth, is no more. TV channels are defaming the nation's renowned social norms and Western culture is gaining ground. Our two greats, Abbasin Yusufzai and Aziz Manairwal, are in a lonely struggle to defend the unique Pakhtun culture.

Politically Pakhtuns are far behind other communities and they do not know the political philosophy of the day. Militancy, foreign intrigues and mutual distrust have made them a disunited nation.

The various religious and ethnic groups are also harming the nation. These aggressive groups are working for their own interests. The lack of sincere leadership and mainstream political party has pushed the nation into political backwardness.

The already weak economic position of the community has been further devastated by wars and military operations. The high rate of unemployment is providing a boom to militancy. Business activities have been hit and businessmen are leaving the region. Agriculture, which was a main source of livelihood, has received a heavy blow due to mass evacuation of people from war zones. The rising prices of essential commodities and low wages have increased the worries of the poor. Pakhtuns have been kept away from education since the establishment of Pakistan. It was only in the 1980s that the nation took to education but that pace could not continue for long and Taliban hardliners became a stumbling block in the way. Taliban destroyed more than 450 schools and banned women's education.

A peaceful Pakhtunkhwa is only possible when its youth are educated. There is no dearth of talent in the area but lack of facilities has left them far behind in education. The Afghan war also brought the menace of sectarianism and ethnicity to the region. The Sunni and Shia communities had lived together for decades without any tension. It was military dictator Zia-ul-Haq who created rifts between these sects in Pakhtuns. Sectarian clashes have devastated the nation and it is a looming threat to the people.

It is to be mentioned that Pakhtuns are peaceful and warm-hearted but the current situation has made them a generally disliked nation.

Militancy has pushed Pakhtuns 20 years back and if the existing situation persists soon they will be declared a failed nation.

To sum up, lack of sincere leadership, Afghan issue, spy agencies' secret role, less education, no job opportunities, lack of general awareness, internal differences and growing tribalism are the causes that have landed the nation in these deep troubles and miseries.

Pakhtun leaders, politicians, tribal chiefs, intellectuals, youths and activists are appealed to resolve their internal differences at this critical time and come forward to save the nation from further destruction.

The government of Pakistan, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and the US and its allies are also urged to stop playing with the innocent Pakhtuns, declare the so-called war on terror null and void and seek a political solution to the menace of terrorism.