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Another Tragedy for Hazaras

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In the night between Thursday and Friday, suspected Taliban militants halted three passenger vehicles in Ghor province. They singled out ethnic Hazara travellers, lined them up and shot them in cold blood. Fourteen people including a newly-wed couple were killed. The incident which obviously is a sectarian one has triggered angers among Afghan populace. President Hamid Karzai – as usual – has condemned the incident deeming it a mere incident of civilian killing. Nonetheless, it was not a suicide bombing; the assailants targeted people from a particular ethnic groups.

Among the various ethnic groups residing in Afghanistan, the one that has faced extreme discrimination, genocide, deprivation and suppression throughout the history is the Hazaras. They form about 20% of Afghanistan's population but have never been given their due rights.

Under Taliban rule, the Hazaras faced indiscriminate genocide. The November 1998 report of Human Rights Watch (HRW) documents the massacre of civilians and other serious breaches of international humanitarian law committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan in August, 1998. At least 8000 Hazaras were singled out and massacred by the Taliban regime only in Mazar-i Sharif, the capital city of Balkh province of Afghanistan.

In post-2001 Afghanistan too, Hazaras have continuously been the target of brutal attacks by Taliban and other terror groups. Last year in August, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar leader of Hezb-e Islami openly threatened to exterminate Hazaras in his Eid message in the following words: "The time will come when the oppressed people of Afghanistan will stand for taking their usurped

rights and then the [Hazaras] will have no safe havens in any corner of the country. Some of them will escape to Iran where too they will be treated cruelly and barbarically.”

Since then attacks on Hazaras have multiplied. There is doubt that Taliban and Hezb-e Islami are involved in such sectarian attacks. In April Hussain Nazari - who was running for provincial council election - along with his team of nine people were first abducted and then beheaded by Taliban in Sar e pul province. They were all Hazaras. Last month, 17 Hazaras were tortured and killed in central Daikundi province.

Sectarian violence will have catastrophic outcomes for Afghanistan. Lack of attention from government, human rights organizations, UN and international community to the issue increases chances that incidents such as that in Ghor would repeat. The government must immediately act to capture the perpetrators these killings and brought them to justice. Passing messages of condolences will cure no pain.

It has to be understood that this is one of the proven methods of militants to bring a mental drift and divide among the people belonging to different ethnic or sectarian communities. In this regard, first of all one group is targeted and after that another group is targeted and they try to give impression that both the groups are enemies of each other and targeting each other. In the beginning, people condemn the act without considering their ethnic or sectarian affiliations but when the members of their own group are targeted, they become silent. So the first phase is to make people silent when large number of people are targeted and killed on the basis of ethnicity or sect. In the second phase, some people are assigned from both the groups with the duty of blaming the other group whenever their group or community is targeted. This eventually leads to a situation when all the members of a group believe that the other group is their enemy and they should hate each other. In such circumstances, the bloodshed and killings lose their meaning and are taken quite normal. This all ends in a situation when country gets divided into different groups based on religion or ethnicity that live together but hate each other and just like Iraq, this hatred can any time take the shape of organized military conflict.

The militants successfully practiced the above strategy in a number of countries like Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and others and now same seeds of hate have been sown in our country as well. The only way to tackle this problem is to unanimously condemn it without considering religion or ethnicity. It is necessary that our newspapers, all our leaders, our experts on television and radio should condemn it and show it as a blow not only to the Shia and Hazara community but to every single Afghan. Similarly, our Imams of mosques should condemn it in their weekly or daily sermons and every single individual should condemn it whenever they sit together. This is the only way we will be able to avoid similar incidents in future, otherwise, this fire of hatred and divide will reach to the door of every Afghan house.