

Barbaric “Justice” of Taliban Stirred Anger In Pakistan

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A video, shot on a mobile phone, stirred anger in Pakistani nation in which a 17-year-old-girl Chand was being flogged by Taliban of Swat, where on Feb. 16 the provincial government of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) has made a ‘deal’ with militants to bring ‘peace’ in the valley. In the video, the girl screams in pain throughout and begs to be killed. A voice is heard saying ‘hold her legs tight’.

The video was emerged on April 3 and shown almost by all Pakistani TV channels. The President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari ‘ordered an inquiry’ of the incident. Moreover, the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP), Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry took suo moto notice and directed the federal interior secretary to procure and produce the ‘girl’ before the court on April 6.

Despite the Taliban sympathizers, especially some right-wing journalists, try to down play the incident civil society organizations held protest marches almost in all big cities of Pakistan. They condemned the incident and raised slogans in which they said ‘no to Taliban justice.’

Reacting on the incident, former information minister Sherry Rehman has submitted an adjournment motion seeking debate in the National Assembly, lower house of the parliament.

Some Taliban supporters say that the video is fake; some claim it is six months old. In contrast, Samar Minallah, the human rights activist and documentary film-maker, claimed video is genuine. She told news reporter that the video was being circulated from mobile phone to mobile phone and from person to person. She said that she received the video via email from a human rights activist of Swat. Minallah said that everyone in Swat knows that the incident took place but unfortunately the NWFP government wants to divert the attention of the masses from the actual issue. Furthermore, BBC Urdu Service and another well-read English daily confirmed that the incident was accrued in Kala Kali village of Tehsil Kabal in Swat valley after the peace deal with Taliban. Muslim Khan, spoke-person of Swat’s Taliban first admitted the validity of the incident; however, he said that it shouldn’t be done in public but in a room. Interestingly, just after a day he changed his own statement. He contradicted his previous account while he was talking to the media again on April 4.

Although the incident was widely condemned but the Taliban, their well-wishers and the NWFP government claimed that to show the video is a conspiracy against the peace deal. A co-host, Mushtaq Minhas, of a TV program, Bolta Pakistan of Ajj TV, said during his program, that the incident is not an issue and to telecast the video is part of a conspiracy against Pakistan and Muslims. Appallingly, even many well-educated people were had the same view while they made phone calls during the same program. An Urdu, Pakistan’s national language, columnist Abbas Mehkary has almost the same view. Addressing a press conference, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairwoman Asma Jahangir appealed to the media to not to glorify the terrorists and terrorism.

Religious parties appeared reluctant to openly condemn the incident. A local newspaper tried to contact the leaders of leading religious parties of the country in order to take their stance over the

barbaric act but they either did not pick up their phones or refused to comment on the incident, saying that they were not aware of the actual circumstances. Yet, Mufti Muneeb, a religious leader, says only an authorized court can find a woman guilty over allegations of illicit relation. Many are raising the question: what gives the Taliban the right or authority to act as judge, jury and executioner?

A senior journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai from Peshawar, capital of NWFP, reported that Chand is not the only Swat woman victim. The Taliban awarded punishment of public flogging about 25 times to men and twice to women during the past two years.

This is the first video of its kind came on surface. Reports say, a member of Taliban saw a boy Adalat Khan coming out from Chand's house. The Taliban accused them for illicit relationship. The boy, an electrician by profession, told the Taliban that he was asked to fix some electrical appliances in the girl's house but they did not believe him and lashed 30 times to both of them in public. There was no trial, she was unable to offer any defense and the girl and the boy were flogged on the sole evidence of a Talib.

Co-Chairman of HRCP Iqbal Haider said Taliban were no authority to decide that what was immoral and what was not. He said army and politicians had retreated in a way by surrendering before Taliban through making peace accord with them. He added that terrorists had reached Punjab, Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan provinces. He believed that the recent agreement with Taliban that was made by the government was 'surrender', not an accord.

Some analysts say that President Zardari may come under renewed pressure both within the country and abroad not to sign the controversial deal with the Taliban in Swat after the incident.

Interestingly, NWFP minister Mian Iftikhar, belongs to Awami National Party (ANP, a secular party) sees the video as a conspiracy, but on the other hand, spokesman of ANP, Senator Zahid Khan, said flogging a woman in public was against the Islamic concept of justice, humanity and Pushtoonwali code.

"The video exposes the barbarity that lies at the heart of the Taliban movement. This is the Taliban version of Sharia law in action, and it is coming to a chowk near you in the foreseeable future," an editorial of a daily newspaper declared.

"In Pakistan in particular where the Hudood laws were formulated under the Zia regime, the objective was not to bring justice in the society but to throttle all forms of justice. In this respect, the Taliban in Swat and those who ruled Afghanistan for some time are Zia's children," writes Ayesha Siddiqi, a social scientist in an English daily on April 5. Zia-ul-Haq was a military dictator who ruled the country under martial law from 1977 to 88 and Islamized the country.

The situation in Swat is quite alarming. Now the Taliban are controlling Swat with the 'blessing,' of the government. They are kidnapping people for ransom and occupying private and public properties. In a recent incident, around 50 Taliban occupied the residence of former federal minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Q leader Amir Muqam in Bahrain, Swat on April 1. Militants also have been taking control of emerald mines in hills near Fizza Gut Park, an area in Mingora city and other mineral mine in the Swat Valley. The government institutions are barred to function. On April 3, the Taliban broke into the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) office in Swat and stopped its functioning. Nobody is there to stop or challenge them. On the other hand, within days 13 more Swat militants were released while dozens were freed earlier.

The situation of journalists is graver. They are carrying out their professional duties under constant

pressure and 'self imposed censorship.' A journalist Musa Khan, from Geo TV, who was covering the 'peace deal' event, was reportedly killed by the militants because they were not happy the way he was exposing the happening. Paradoxically, his own colleagues were not voiced, due to various reasons, against the Taliban for his murder.

Under the 'peace deal' Qazi (Islamic judge) courts were established, which is the first phase to impose Sharia in the region. Through the 'deal' the Taliban have got legitimacy to control the area. Chief of Tehrik-e-Taliban, Swat chapter, Maulana Fazlullan says TTP popularity up after deal. Muslim Khan, Taliban's key commander told a UK based daily 'the Guardian,' "Swat is a test case. After this, it (sharia) should be brought in the whole of Pakistan."

It is awful that even after these brutal incidents still there are many, especially some journalists and some intellectuals, who are supporting Taliban and their way of justice. Hopefully, they would enjoy if they themselves get this sort of 'justice' by the Taliban.

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