

1939

Spanish Civil War: Generalissimo Francisco Franco conquers Madrid after a three-year siege.



1959

The State Council of the **People's Republic of China** dissolves the government of Tibet.

1970

An earthquake strikes **western Turkey** at about 23:05 local time, killing 1,086 and injuring 1,260.

1990

United States President **George H. W. Bush** posthumously awards Jesse Owens the Congressional Gold Medal.

End civilian killings or lose battle

Kabul needs to offer accountability after the military killed 36 children and adult civilians in a village in Northeastern Afghanistan



Pic courtesy: Tim Hetherington

On May 16, the Afghan government apologised to the families of 30 children and six civilian adults who were killed in air force strikes in the northeastern part of the country. The government claimed that the attack also killed at least 18 high-ranking Taliban fighters.

The brief apology came 44 days after machine-gun and rocket fire brought a violent end to a ceremony honoring children who had memorised the Quran and nine days after the United Nations released a damning report questioning Kabul's "respect of the rules of precaution and proportionality under international humanitarian law."

The text of the apology reveals the chasm between the rulers and the ruled, the centre and the periphery: The families of the 36 civilian victims remain unnamed — common nouns rather than real people struggling with grief and loss.

It does not offer justice nor promise greater caution and deliberation from Kabul. It attempts to offer the self-serving consolation that the Afghan government is better than the Taliban by saying, "The key difference between the government and insurgents is that a legitimate government will always seek forgiveness for mistakes."

The "mistake" that the apology refers to occurred on April 2 in the village of Daftani in the Dasht-e-Archi district of Kunduz Province. Scores of children were being honored at a madrasa for completing their memorisation of the Quran. As part of an old Afghan tradition, elders would tie turbans on the heads of the children, a ritual called "dastar bandi."

Dasht-e-Archi is a vast barren landscape, where 90,000 people make a living from subsistence agriculture and trade with neighbouring Tajikistan. Though the United Nations has labelled the district free of poppy cultivation since 2006, its proximity to the Tajikistan border makes it a vital transit point for the trafficking of drugs and other illicit goods.

The Taliban also dominate the district, a striking example of an area deemed too distant and too difficult for Kabul and the regional government in Kunduz to manage. It is a place where drug mafias and armed groups fill the void, and the population is ignored by the politicians.

Samihullah, a flower shop worker who like many Afghans uses one name, transported bouquets of bright plastic flowers to the madrasa to be given to teachers and students after the ceremony. Around noon, as the ceremony was drawing to a close, the sky above was filled with the roar of three or four helicopters.

Then came the deafening sound of

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machine-gun fire, and bullets hit the students, teachers and guests. As they tried to flee the madrasa, rockets were fired from the helicopters.

After two rockets exploded over a two-story structure attached to the madrasa building, Nematullah, a madrasa teacher, heard an announcement from overhead: "Don't be frightened. Do not run. Remain calm. You are not our targets."

As it happened, a group of Taliban fighters had gathered about 80 feet away in another building. Two rockets hit the Taliban fighters.

But, witnesses say, the fire from the helicopters killed and wounded numerous civilians who were in their homes and in the wheat fields surrounding the madrasa. Nematullah, the teacher, said he suffered minor injuries as he ran out before two more rockets hit the site of the graduation ceremony, where most of the students were killed.

Saif-ur-Rahman, 40, a villager, was standing outside a shop about three miles from the madrasa when he heard the gunfire and explosions. Saif-ur-Rahman remembered that three of his cousins, including Samihullah, the flower seller, were at the madrasa. After several attempts, he reached a cousin on his phone. "There has been an attack," the cousin said. "We can't find Samihullah."

When Saif-ur-Rahman arrived at the madrasa, he saw scraps of the ceremonial turbans and slippers and shoes scattered among the bloodied bodies. The villagers took the injured to nearby clinics and pharmacies in taxis and rickshaws and on motorbikes.

Saif-ur-Rahman found Samihullah in a clinic in the village, which wasn't equipped to treat the fractures in his arms and legs. He moved Samihullah to a hospital in Kunduz, about 45 miles away. By the end of the week, he and several others would be transported by

helicopter to Kabul.

As the word of the attack spread, current and former Afghan officials and other influential figures took a celebratory tone, emphasising the deaths of the Taliban fighters and ignoring the deaths of the students. Their remarks illustrated how that for certain segments of Afghan society — talking heads, workers for nongovernmental organizations and the government — a victim is a victim only when killed by the Taliban and the Islamic State.

Thus prominent Afghans were rationalising the killings of Afghan children by the Afghan government in pursuit of the Taliban. The civilians killed in operations by the Afghan government and international coalition are simply an unfortunate byproduct of war, as if the children in that madrasa had willingly sacrificed themselves for some imagined greater good.

As the details surrounding the civilian deaths began to surface, some social media accounts — some based in Afghanistan, others in Western cities — lashed out at anyone who questioned the official narrative and pointed out that civilians were killed in the attack. Some of these accounts belonged to former government officials, others to journalists, while the rest were anonymous and suddenly popped up in the feeds of anyone who raised questions about civilian casualties.

People who had reported or discussed the civilian casualties online were told that the civilian deaths are "another example of how Taliban use civilians as human shields." Some claimed that the photographs of children killed were inventions by Pakistan, which is seeking to turn the Afghans against their military.

Shortly after the strikes, the Kabul government admitted to civilian casualties in a vague statement that implicitly praised the professionalism of the Afghan security forces and gave no sense that they also killed scores of children. Newspaper headlines in the region and beyond followed the same pattern: The children were barely mentioned, and the Taliban received the top billing.

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To stop ordinary Afghans from turning further away from Kabul, Ghani needs to do more than offer weak apologies. He needs to promise justice and accountability.

(Ali M. Latifi is a reporter. Ehsanullah Ehsan is a researcher and journalist.)

Karak Break

What Customers Want?



MOHAMED ISA

Perhaps, this is the ultimate question any company needs to address: What customers want? Answering this short question could spell the difference between failure & success and between losses & profits. Based on my experience and observations, countless companies try to come up with catchy visions, elaborative mission statements and best practices codes to address this vital question.

At times, they hire top-notch consultants, they invest a ton of money, they spend countless hours in meetings, briefings and brainstorming sessions thinking hard and long about the perfect answer to this question. I attended many of these sessions myself. I was frustrated by the many hours I spent in non-productive meetings and the pile of documents to go through. And when the project is finished, the policies are signed off and filed in the cabinets not to be seen again. What a shame!

And this is the eternal problem: Companies are not practicing what they preach. I am a customer of one company that raves about its customer service in all its literature whether its website, annual reports, or its code of best



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practice. If you read its literature, you will think this company is run by angels who descended from the sky. Far from it, just examine its social media feeds to see what dismayed customers say. I particularly liked this comment: "Two hours for a single transaction! You ruined my whole day." That hurts! To add insult to injury, no one replied to his comment from the company.

When I worked for Unilever, we had a different approach to finding what customers want? We had a programme called: Feet on the street. The entire company from the chairman to the lowest ranking staff would go out to spend hours in supermarkets to speak directly to our consumers. We asked simple questions: (1) Why do you like our products? And (2) How can we improve them for you? These insights were fed directly to our research and development department so that we improve our products and innovate new ones.

Now, if you want my verdict on this issue. Customers want deeds not words. They do not care about what your vision, mission or code of conduct say about customer service. They care about getting reliable products or services every time they deal with your company. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less. There is one company that got this right in the Old Souq of Manama. This small unknown company is in the cargo business and it hit the nail on the head when it comes to what customers want: "We deliver cargo. Not excuses."

(Mohamed Isa, Award-Winning Speaker & Best-Selling Author, @mohamedisa3ds)

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TWEETS

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@MoSalah

02



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DonaldTrump

03



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04



welcome the re- e of Joshua & Holt, who were mprisoned in a. U.S. policy to- zuela remains d. We support elan people & to return to de- ve wish Joshua y the best after t period.

@SecPompeo

(Views expressed s are personal and ecessarily reflect our ial stances)