

LETTER

Comparing two provinces

A tale of two provinces. (With apologies to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.)

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

The above quote describes the present COVID-19 situation. We are at once wise and foolish in our handling of the pandemic; we embrace the belief that our health measures will be adequate but shake our heads in disbelief at the results and our powerlessness to break free of the grip of this disease; we have hope for a positive outcome, but the repeated dashing of those hopes is resulting in desperation.

The two provinces in this story are Uttar Pradesh (technically a state) in India and our own province of Alberta.

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in India with 240 million people; Alberta has 4.4 million people. UP (per capita) income is \$1134 compared to Alberta average (household) income of \$125,000.

As far as C-19 cases are concerned, one would think that UP would track comparatively to Alberta on a per population basis. At the time of writing this,

Alberta presently has 18,421 active cases with 1609 being reported on Sept. 14.

Since UP has 54 times the population and a lower standard of living, they probably don't have as good a health care system as prosperous Alberta. They probably have at least 54 times the COVID cases. They must be really suffering over there.

Apparently, UP does not have 54 times the cases, it has 269. But not 269 times the cases. That is 269 total cases; down from 310,873 in April. New cases have been below 100 for each of the last 50 days.

Did I mention that UP has only 5.8 per cent of the population vaccinated?

Cue incredulity.

Apparently, UP is doing something that we're not to achieve these results, and it might be worthy of checking out.

What if our AHS officials would pick up the phone and see what they're doing differently?

Maybe we should collectively and loudly demand that someone – anyone – does. And soon!

Here are some suggestions of people of whom we could make that demand: Jason Kenney, Premier; Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health; Dr. Verna Yiu, president and CEO of AHS; Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's chief medical officer of health; our two local MLAs – even our mayor.

Ken Arnold, *Red Deer*

INTERNATIONAL

World should not forget Afghan sacrifices

BY MANSOOR LADHA

SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

Canada is renowned as a welcoming country to refugees and immigrants, fleeing from terrorism, discrimination, and dictatorships all around the world.

That's why Canada's snail-pace response to the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and not acting fast enough to rescue thousands of Afghans stranded at Kabul Airport has placed a black mark against Canada. Canada, which formally withdrew its military from Afghanistan in 2014, airlifted some 3,700 people from Kabul amid the Taliban's rapid takeover by end of August and it is unknown how many Canadians remain in Afghanistan. Canada has said that it will work with allies in the coming months to try and find safe exits for those still in Afghanistan.

After 20 years of war, the Taliban have swept to victory in Afghanistan, whose government and military fell like a deck of cards. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan initially to either capture or kill Osama bin Laden and those responsible for the attack on U.S. on September 11, 2001. After defeating the Taliban, the U.S. shifted its attention from Afghanistan to Iraq, allowing the Taliban time to regroup and reorganize, ensuring them an easy victory.

The U.S.'s reasoning for involvement in Cambodia was to fight against Communism while in Afghanistan was to fight against global terrorism, in both cases in the guise of keeping the world safe for democracy. President Joe Biden will go down in history for making the unjustifiable mistake in Afghanistan by withdrawing hurriedly. He has failed to recognize that Afghanistan was not a U.S. problem, but an international problem aimed at eradicating global terrorism. For that, the Afghans will have to suffer a rerun of the past 20 years they suffered under the Taliban regime.

The Taliban cannot be trusted as they have already begun their reign of terror, as one Kabul resident told an interviewer, that when you leave your house, you don't know if you will come back alive.

Although Taliban officials have insisted that they will fully abide by the U.S. deal and prevent any group from using Afghan soil as a base for attacks against the U.S. and its allies, experience has indicated that they

are quick to change course when convenient. A major concern is that the country will once again become a training ground for terrorism.

So, who are the Taliban? The Taliban, or "students" in the Pashto language, emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. A study of their history shows that the predominantly Pashtun movement first appeared in religious seminaries, mostly funded by Saudi Arabia, known for following a hardline form of Sunni Islam.

International aid agencies have raised concern about an "impending humanitarian crisis" in Afghanistan, with Doctors Without Borders saying the country's vulnerable healthcare system was facing a "potential collapse." There is a shortage of food and basic services are collapsing while other life-saving aid is about to run out. Al Jazeera has reported about an already dire situation in Afghanistan's hospitals which has become worse since the Taliban takeover. Medics have not received salaries in months and one of the major concerns is that health centres are running out of medicines amid an increase in the number of patients coming to facilities. Facing a major humanitarian and displacement crisis, an estimated 550,000 Afghans have been displaced primarily due to insecurity and violence.

Hopefully, the world has learnt lessons from the U.S. involvement in Cambodia in 1975 and in Afghanistan in 2021, which has brought inconceivable human suffering. Afghanistan is headed for an uncertain future, rife with authoritarian rule, civil war, harassment of women, hostility towards the West and absence of human rights. It's a challenging time for the West who would be well advised to undertake constructive engagement with the Taliban to lessen radicalism and preserve peaceful co-existence. Immediate and urgent international action is needed to assist Afghans who helped Canada and other countries in times of war with the necessities of life through the coming months. Their personal sacrifices to the world should not be forgotten.

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based writer and author of *Memoirs of a Muhindi: Fleeing East Africa for the West* and *A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims*.

LETTERS POLICY

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ADVOCATE POLL



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Do you believe the \$100 incentive will encourage Albertans to get vaccinated?

- Yes.
- No.

Should Alberta follow B.C. and mandate proof of vaccination?

- No – 82.75 %
- Yes – 17.25%

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