Taliban Moves to Erase Afghan Women's Identities



Collected photo.

Taliban authorities have banned the use of women's real names in official documents in Afghanistan's northern Balkh province. Under the new directive, government employees and healthcare workers have been instructed to address women as 'Bibi' or 'Dadi' instead of using their names. The same terms must also be used in official records, Spanish media outlet El País reported.

Rights activists view the decision as an attempt to erase women's personal identities and dignity. They fear the policy could create serious complications in healthcare services, particularly in identifying patients and maintaining accurate medical records. Access to healthcare has already become increasingly difficult for Afghan women due to restrictions on medical education and other barriers.

Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban has issued more than 144 directives restricting women's rights. Girls over the age of 12 are barred from continuing their education, while women are prohibited from working in most professions. Strict restrictions have also been imposed on women's ability to speak in public.

Despite these restrictions, Afghan women continue to resist in different ways. They are secretly running businesses and maintaining underground schools for girls. An Associated Press report published on November 17 highlighted these efforts, featuring the experiences of a salon owner and a teacher in Kabul.

Lalaha Osmani, a rights activist who has long campaigned for women's identity rights, launched a movement in 2017 to include mothers' names on Afghan identity cards and birth certificates. Although the campaign secured an option to voluntarily include mothers' names in 2020, that progress stalled after the Taliban returned to power. Expressing her frustration over the latest restrictions, Osmani said, "In Afghanistan, calling a woman by her real name has now become an act of resistance."