

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 23, 2018

Another Attack in Barchi

Yesterday, on April 22, a suicide bomber attacked a voter registration center in Dashte Barchi neighborhood. The attack resulted in death of around 57 people including at least five children, and injury to over 100 others. The attack was not only an attempt to discourage the voters to register themselves but also threaten Hazaras, so that they are not able to carry out their social, political and religious activities. The responsibility of the attack was claimed by ISIS - Daesh in Afghanistan - that said in its statement: "our 'martyred' brother targeted a group of Shias outside the voter registration center in Dashte Barchi." It is important to note that it is not first such attack by Daesh. It has targeted Hazaras in Afghanistan on various occasions.

On Nauroz day this year, ISIS also targeted people near Sakhi shrine which resulted in the death of 29 people and injury to 52 others. Whereas, in August last year, an attack was carried out in Qila-e-Najara neighborhood in Kabul by 4 to 5 attackers who entered the mosque by throwing grenades at the entrance and then started shooting people during Friday prayers, killing more than 40 innocent people, including women and children. The attack was even termed as war crime by Human Rights Watch (HRW) Afghanistan. During the second week of August last year, more than 50 people were killed in Mirza Olang village of Sar-e-pul province; the victims were mostly Hazara Shia.

On August 01, more than 20 Hazaras were killed in an attack on Shia mosque in Herat province. As a matter of fact, the list of such attacks seems to be getting lengthier; unfortunately, there is no serious arrangements in place to stop such attacks. In June 2017, Al-Zahra Mosque, situated in Dasht-e-Barchi, where mostly Hazaras reside, was targeted by a suicide bomber. The attack resulted in the death of at least 10 people and injury to 15 others.

In November 2016, 27 Hazaras were killed and more than 30 others were wounded through a suicide attack at the Baqir-ul-uloom mosque in District 6 of capital Kabul, where the people were commemorating 'Arbaeen'. That had in fact followed the tragic attack on the Sakhi Shrine in the capital which was carried out during Ashura procession and had killed 18 people. A similar type of attack was carried out in Balkh province that had also targeted Shia Hazaras who were worshipping during Ashura and had resulted in deaths of 14 innocent people.

In July 2016, three attackers with suicide vests attacked the Hazara protestors who were raising their voice for changing Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) power project route through Bamyan. Two of the attackers blasted themselves among the protestors while the third one was killed by the security forces. The attack resulted in death of more than 85 people and injury to over 400 others and thus marked one of the most tragic incidents in Afghanistan's history. The attack was also claimed by Daesh.

Moreover, who can forget the tragic incident when seven innocent civilians belonging to Zabul province were kidnapped on a highway and later killed brutally, which included the 9-year old girl Shukria, whose throat was slashed by the kidnappers.

Just few months earlier to that incident, at least 13 Hazaras were killed by gunmen in Zari district of Balkh province, while they were travelling in a minibus. And in February same year, 31 Hazara passengers were abducted from Zabul province while they were travelling from Herat to Kabul, most of whom were later released.

Most of these incidents have been linked to Daesh, and mostly they have even claimed the responsibility but, unfortunately, there have not been tangible measures to stop the situation. The government authorities have kept on insisting that the threats of Daesh are not serious and Afghan forces have control over them; however, the claims have not proved to be right until now. And if the security arrangements remain as they are, Hazaras will keep on suffering such brutal attacks.

As the government authorities are not able to secure different parts of the country and important highways, the insurgents create their own check-posts, stop the vehicles, search the passengers and even loot them on various occasions. On some occasions, Hazara passengers have been selectively segregated from others and then taken away or later killed.

With such a situation prevailing, it is really tragic to find the government authorities unconcerned. They mostly claim that they make efforts to ensure the security of the civilians without any distinction but different incidents, every now and then, show that they either do not have the capability to do so or they lack the motivation. Their efforts are mostly observed after the incidents take place and the poor civilians are killed. Thus, the government requires taking practical and tangible measures to control the security situation and ensure the security of everyone without any distinction of ethnicity or race. There are fears that if the security situation remains fragile another civil war may erupt in the country and may once again push Afghanistan towards a quagmire of instability and chaos.



New Waves of Criticism over slow voter registration

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In few last days, Kabul has been witnessing new waves of criticisms and concerns over low participation of people in voter registration ahead of parliamentary and district council elections scheduled to be held in the current year. On Saturday, the Wolesi Jirga summoned Hamayon Muhtat, the head of Population Registration Department (PRD) and acting Independent Election Commission (IEC) secretary Shahla Haqparast to brief lawmakers about preparations for the upcoming elections, ID cards distribution, voter registration and sticker attachment. Some of lawmakers expressed concerns over slow voter registration and ID cards distribution processes but others such as Fatima Nazari, criticized that there is only one center in the entire west of Kabul for ID card distribution implying as a kind of delay tactic applied on certain part this society to deprive them from voting process. The next day, the same solitary and overcrowded center was attacked and left nearly a hundred casualties including injuries and death.

Other MPs such as Humayon Humayon, Haji Zahir Qadir and Mirwais Yaseni claimed that the voter registration forms were sold and purchased. Humayon, first deputy speaker, said those wishing to contest the Oct 20 to polls might misuse the forms. However, Shahla Haqparast said: "No evidence is available to prove voter registration forms or stickers to be sold, the voter documents have special numbers and no one can misuse them." Generally, the lack of voter awareness, insecurity and consequences of stickers on ID cards, lack of enough ID card distribution center in certain area, lack of ID card, lack of people's interest and distrusts on the election process have been mentioned as factors for the slow voter registration.

During the summer, it was reported to the wolesi jirga that 160,000 paper identity cards were distributed to people within a month time (March 21 to April 20) while 189,000 registered as voters in one week across the country. IEC officials told the lower house that the attachment of a sticker to the paper ID cards of those registering as voters was being reconsidered. Humayon Muhtat, PRD head, added that full transparency in the electoral process should not be expected in the absence of a biometric system. He said his department was ready to distribute ID cards to 10 million people eligible for vote in coordination with the IEC. According to Muhtat, 30 million people had received ID cards over the last 45 years. The ID cards distribution process is underway and so far 235,000 people have obtained the paper cards during the past three months across the country. He said 153,000 officers had been given the responsibility distribute the ID cards across the country. Ten million people would be issued the cards over the next six months.

Meanwhile, the Ministerial Council held an extraordinary meeting on Saturday to bargain over the poor appearance

of people in voters' registration process. The Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah voiced serious concern over the voters' registration process and discussed with government officials to find a solution. Abdullah noted that people who go to a registration center, they must have their identity cards with them and only the people who register will be able to vote in the forthcoming elections. He also warned that if the voters' registration process faces failure, the political situation in the country would be challenging.

The Chief Executive also called on religious scholars, tribal elders, monitoring institutions and government officials to make further efforts on the widespread participation of people in voters' registration process. While a day before, President Ghani had also called on religious scholars, civil society, women's networks and all to work for creating awareness among the people. The voter registration process was launched last Saturday by President Ghani and the first lady Rula Ghani. According to officials, the first phase starting on 14th April at provincial capitals will continue up to 13th May; Second phase will start on 15th to 28th May in the center of the provincial districts; and Third phase will start on 30th May to continue up to 12th June 2018 in villages. Holding an ID card and age of 18 are the only requirements to register for elections.

Thus, Election and Transparency Watch Organization of Afghanistan (ETWA) warned on Saturday that the voter registration for the forthcoming parliament and district council elections was moving quite slowly as the public turnout was all time low. The watchdog in a statement said that the insurgents constantly attacked voter registration centers in Ghor and Badghis. The organization believed that improper logistic and security arrangements of the government and its election body have been the reason behind a lagging voter registration. The watchdog recommended awareness programs be planned, political parties and civil societies be encouraged to support the campaign, public trust be gained, facilities for voter registration be bolstered, religious and tribal elders be inspired to foster public participation in the registration process. The voter registration process will be carried out in three phases;

Overall lack of presence of people is a serious issue that may harm the legitimacy of election. If there is no collective action taken by government, IEC, political parties, media and civil society to overcome issue, the election may change to another crisis in the country. However, the IEC reluctantly admitted that they may extend the voter registration period if it continues to be unsatisfactory. "If people's participation were proved less, then other alternative options could be to extend the voter registration in the cities," said Maliha Hassan, a commissioner of the IEC.

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China's Concern about Regional Issues

By Hujjatullah Zia

Chinese officials have been constantly reiterating the principle of win-win cooperation and smile diplomacy between China and the rest of the world. To view China from a colorless lens, it has played a constructive role and seeks to broker peace between nations. Establishing a community with shared future for mankind, in which people of all colors and religions are treated equally and exercise their rights and liberties freely, is the aspiration of Chinese officials.

To view this issue deeply, Beijing has not been engaged in the ongoing regional conflicts in which a large number of civilians were killed and wounded. That is to say, engaging in a violent mechanism is against the principle of China and against the socialism with Chinese characteristics. China is in pursuit of extending the realm of soft power and win the hearts of people through non-violent mechanism. Indeed, cultivating friendly relations and enhancing "heart-to-heart" exchanges are not only the call of time but also a panacea for the regional conflicts. Sitting on the fence does not necessarily mean that China is not concerned about the regional issues. Chinese officials seek to broker peace talks between nations and adhere to reconciliation processes. For example, in line with Pakistan, US, and Afghanistan, China is a member of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) which aims to push the Taliban to resolve the issue through negotiation. The last meeting of QCG was held in Muscat (Oman) in October 2017 to bring the Taliban to peace table. This reflects the fact that China, along with Afghanistan's allies, intends to broker peace talks between Afghan government and the Taliban.

Regarding the summit between US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Beijing is willing to play its role in promoting the settlement of the regional issues. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said, "We expect them [US and DPRK] to follow the 'dual track' approach to advance the political settlement process of the Korean Peninsula issue, so as to promote and achieve the denuclearization on the one hand and establish the peace regime of the Peninsula on the other hand". Thus, China is highly concerned about regional issues and willing to promote peace across the region.

Chinese officials are also against the war trade between Beijing and Washington and urge the US to end this issue through negotiation. "We are against any trade war. We believe any dispute should be worked out through

dialogue and consultation," Chinese Ambassador the US Cui Tiankai is cited as saying.

Speaking in a press conference on Wednesday entitled as "War Trade without Benefitting US", Chen Fengying, former president of Chinese Research Institute of Global Economy, said that the emerging trade war between Beijing and Washington would undermine the global landscape and have repercussions for the entire region. Answering to my question whether Trump's recent tweet regarding his friendship with President Xi Jinping was a green light to China for dialogue, Chen said that dialogue was unavoidable and the two countries had to organize their negotiating team and hold dialogue very seriously. She added that four platforms should be considered in dialogue: strategic platform, economic platform, culture, and cyber security. Reiterating the promotion of simultaneous four platforms, she said that there was an atmosphere for tackling the issue through dialogue, however, both sides had their own choices which make the issue a little problematic.

It is believed that forming a peaceful society for all nations is one of the lofty ambitions of China that promotes regional peace and connectivity. As I mentioned in one of my commentaries, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will not only connect the world but also the hearts and enhance people-to-people exchanges more than ever before. The more we realize our shared interests, the more we will promote regional peace and prosperity. In this global village, we need to resolve conflicts through dialogue, change negative rivalries to positive competition, and struggle for the well-being of all nations and individuals.

Let there be no doubt that a peaceful region will benefit the entire world and all nations are supposed to play their role constructively in social, cultural, political and economic issues. The ongoing challenges and conflicts will be a threat to all nations in one way or another. To resolve these issues, the world needs to enhance economy and trade to alleviate poverty, adhere to dialogue to avoid conflicts, uphold heart-to-heart exchanges to stop misunderstanding and animosity, and exercise the spirit of brotherhood to put an end to violence. In short, all nations need to struggle to form a peaceful world for the present and future generations and support the idea of building a community with shared future for mankind.

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