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

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Elections: Ethnic Low Turn Out and Further Marginalization

Ethnic Marginalization is one of the biggest social issue in Afghanistan. According to the Governments' policies, specific ethnics and religious groups have been systematically marginalized in the past in Afghanistan. However, all Afghans have equal rights constitutionally now. As a result, systematic marginalization policies in the past have been the cause of ethnic marginalization in Afghanistan, but in our age electoral processes may act so: One of the most visible signs of marginalization is lack of civic engagement among a specific ethnic group or region. This lack of participation can reflect the historical background a specific community as well: If the members of a specific community has been marginalized in the past they would have low trust to the electoral processes. Further, if they participate actively in the electoral process and do not experience tangible changes in their political and socio-economic status, they will consider the electoral process as ineffective. Indeed, this would keep them away from being a part of the polity and would further limit their access to the provision of government services. In addition to that, marginalization affects state benefits for business environment, education, health maintenance, and public safety. These benefits are contingent on numbers of registered voters and voter participation.

If specific ethnic groups do not register and do not vote, they would be denied national and local elections benefits. Therefore, low voter registration and consequently low voter participation would affect political and socio-economic opportunities for members of a specific ethnic group or community.

This lack of ethnic involvement can become an increasingly critical social issue in our society. In many countries, declining levels of participation, achievement and motivational characteristics in the population have become more serious issues and have remained unsolved in such countries. Policies of the government focus on security, economic and governance to provide the basic service to the citizens of Afghanistan. While it shall focus on assimilation the ethnic groups into the polity by promoting participation in civic life as various research findings suggest. Without assimilation into the polity, a specific ethnic or social group of the country may fail to receive benefits that could improve their security, economic and governance, and in brief it they may fail receiving benefits that could improve wellbeing.

Therefore, the government should analyze the ethnic population involvement in the community in order to understand its voter mobilization characteristics that undermine its level of participation in the political process, especially in the current Wolsi Jirga and District Councils elections. In analyzing the lack of political participation of ethnic groups and its effects in Afghanistan, the government should look for the motivations or lack of thereof that have led to the very low rate of voter registration that would Low voter registration in Afghanistan has many reasons including lack of public awareness campaigns by IEC, deterioration of security, low performance of the previous legislators, unequal distribution of political and economic opportunities in the country.

Each ethnic group has played a significant role in developing and defending the country. As a result, they should equally be involved in the voting of the country. If not so, they would give up their voices in the society. Thus, their basic requirements would not be articulated to political leaders of the country. And without it, their needs would not be addressed: an issue that just would further deepen the social gap and social marginalization of specific ethnic or social groups in Afghanistan that would undermine the national building other democratic processes in the country. As a result, the government shall analyzes such trends in the country and find their causes and address them in a proper manner. Doing so it will ensure improvements of the democratic processes and institutions and social cohesion in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has one of the lowest voter registration rates comparing the previous elections. It is an issue that has raised the concerns of both the government and the political leaders of Afghanistan. As voter registration and consequently voter turnout characteristics show the level of the ethnic population in the country, the low rate of them, especially among a specific ethnicity or social groups, show the level of their disappointment of the political system that could lead to their further marginalization.

Emotional Approach to Tragic Scenes is Self-destructive

By Hujjatullah Zia

The level of public fear and mistrust has increased with the Sunday's suicide attack in Kabul which killed and wounded dozens of civilians, including women and children. The tragic incident sparked off strong sentiment as bloody pictures were posted in social media with harsh comments. However, mixed reaction was shown towards participation in the upcoming election.

A large number of people have commented that they will not leave the ground for terrorists and militancy will not be a deterrent to their participation. According to popular sentiment, terrorist fighters seek to hamper people's participation in provincial and district council elections through waging attacks but they will not be coerced. Streams of Afghans blood were shed and their fingers were cut off for their participation in past elections; nonetheless, they continued to uphold democracy through flocking to ballot boxes with a gleam of hope for a peaceful and prosperous future. The public realize that embracing democracy will not be possible without sacrifices. Hence, if they succumb to the threat, militants will be the winner.

However, the horrible consequence of terrorist attacks and suicide bombings is undeniable. A number of people are of the opinion that their ballots will make no changebut only risk their lives. The death of women and children on Sunday's attack will demoralize the public in general and women in particular. They do not tend to risk their lives in return for nothing, based on their perception.

The sentiment against officials in media, mainly social media, was easily noticeable. It was said that if government is not able to ensure their safety, there will be no reason to register for voting. In other words, a large number of people are likely to have lost their confidence in the government. The graph of civilian casualties remain as high as the two past years, which were considered the deadliest years for the country. Due to the high mortality rate, the wall of mistrust between state and nation has grown taller.

The Sunday's attack came as Afghan officials assured people of their safety and said that the security forces had tightened the security and they could register for voting without fear. However, the attack suggested otherwise and widened the gap between state and nation.

On the other hand, the mouth-watering promises of candidates before elections and their practices after elections have been changed into a political satire in the social media. Mostly, the candidates promise beyond their abilities and un-fulfillment of such promises will make people lose their trust in them. This issue also put people in limbo whom to vote and why to vote. It is self-explanatory that the militant fighters, especially the Taliban, seek to bar people from participating in the elections. For instance, there had been five attacks in less than a week against the election process. The series of recent attacks – including the Tuesday's attack on voter registration center in Ghor province and the abduction of three employees of Election Commission and two policemen – suggest not only the Taliban's power but also their intention to disrupt the election process. Although the abductees were released after the mediation of local elders, there is still a sense of fear in the air.

The Taliban turned down President Ghani's call for participating in the forthcoming election as a political party and dubbed it "fake and exhibitory". Holding out against Kabul's peace offer, the Taliban continue their attacks against combatants and non-combatants. They have constantly stood against democracy and freedoms, which have no room in their radical mindset.

Although the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed the responsibility for Sunday's attack on civilians, a number of political pundits deny the presence of ISIL group in Afghanistan saying that the Taliban's splinter group has changed its white flag into black one and operates under the term of ISIL. In fact, all terrorist groups are against democratic process and seek to target the electorate and polling stations.

Constitutionally, the government is responsible to safeguard people's life and struggle for forming a peaceful and civil society. To protect the rights and liberties of nation, the National Unity Government (NUG) will have to reinforce intelligence and reconnaissance and change the traditional mechanism for combating terrorism.

Meanwhile, spreading hatred and posting appalling pictures of the victims in social media should be stopped for two adverse effects they will put on the public: First, the viewers will be traumatized and more disappointed. Second, it will widen the gap between state and nation. Thus, capitalizing on public emotion in social media is self-destructive and will only breed further mistrust.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Asia-Pacific countries identify Fintech initiatives at ECOSOC forum to meet global goals

ESCAP-Bangladesh-Indonesia-Kazakhstan side event: Transforming Finance in Asia-Pacific: The FinTech revolution

By ESCAP-SCAS

New York (ESCAP News) -- Asia-Pacific countries met on the sidelines of the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development in New York this week to explore opportunities for scaling up the Financial Technology Industry (Fintech), such as mobile money and micro lending companies, to meet the ambitious targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The high-level participants recognized the need to increase access to financial services for SMEs and the region's poorest people, if the aim of mobilizing 2.5 trillion annually in Asia and the Pacific is to be attained. They noted however that regulators would need to strike the right balance between facilitating innovation, maintaining financial stability and ensuring consumer protection.

Organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh, Indonesia and Kazakhstan, the side event provided a platform for countries to review their experience in pursuing FinTech initiatives, and identify policy and regulatory challenges in harnessing their potential in the region.

In her opening remarks, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Dr. Shamshad Akhtar underscored that access to financial services is an integral component of the global financing for the development agenda. "Frontier technologies are offering new solutions for providing an impetus to financial inclusion," she said.

"FinTech solutions include cell phone apps that allow users to execute online transactions, such as bill payments, store credit scoring of consumers and small businesses owners based on big data analytics, along with online alternative financing platforms such as peer-to-peer lending and equity crowd funding."

Dr. Akhtar emphasized that, "Asia-Pacific is leading globally the Fintech emergence and they are transforming the way people pay, send money, borrow, lend, and invest."

Mr. Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Minister of Finance, Bangladesh added, "We need to create a regional platform for sharing experiences and best practices to enhance MSMEs access to finance in the Asia-Pacific region."

Mr. Bambang P.S. Brodjonegoro, Minister of National Development Planning, Indonesia further underscored that governments need to "highlight the importance of proper regulatory framework to take advantage of FinTech to support the attainment of SDGs particularly in tackling inequality."

Panel members at the special side event included: Kairat Umarov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN; Mustafa Mastoor, Minister of Economy of Afghanistan; Nim Dorji, Finance Secretary of Bhutan; Mohammad Khazaee, Vice Minister of Economic Affairs and Head of the Organization for Investments and Economic Assistance, Islamic Republic of Iran; Azeema Adam, Government of Maldives Envoy for FFD, and Odo Tevi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Vanuatu to the UN.

Along with Kathleen DeRose, Clinical Associate Professor of Finance and FinTech Leader, NYU's Stern School of Business; Xiaochen Zhang, President of Fintech4Good; Alisa DiCaprio, Head of Research at R3; Alexander R. Malaket, President of OPUS Advisory Services International Inc., and Lidy Nacpil, Coordinator, Jubilee South Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development.

Participants also concluded that Asia-Pacific's intergovernmental platform for financing for development, steered by ESCAP, is already disseminating new developments in digital technology and advising on the infrastructure needed to tackle pervasive financial exclusion in the region. This event served as a step in this direction, as it provided a peer learning opportunity and a platform for sharing of knowledge and experiences.

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Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net
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