

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

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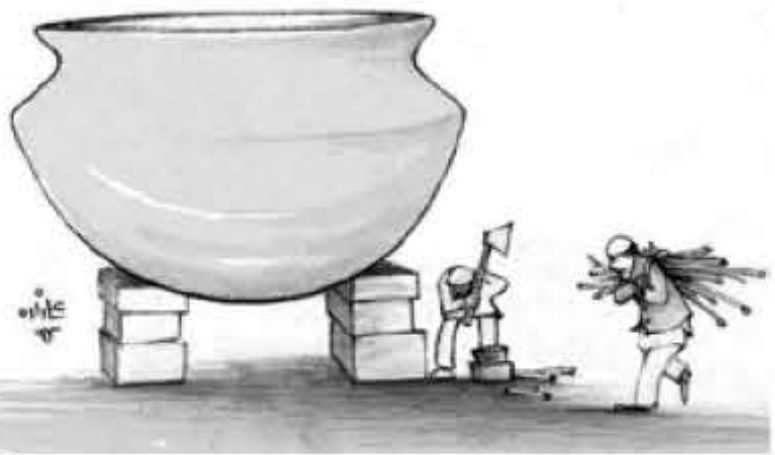
Plans of New Ministers and Public Hope

The process of the verification of the new cabinet members is going on smoothly, exhibiting the actual power of democracy and a democratic government. In a condition that government is run by two strong and most influential heads of the state who are backed by a thousand more important politicians, tribal chiefs, social elders, warlords, industrialists and others, they cannot do anything against the desire of the elected representatives of people in the lower and upper houses of parliament. Till latest reports, only nine ministers have been approved by the parliament while almost a dozen candidates were rejected by the house. The government is also busy in introducing new members to the house in order to fill up the space of needed ministers and quickly resume the work of administration as without any cabinet and proper ministers, almost all the ministries have become practically paralyzed and the work of state has become badly affected. We have repeatedly pointed out in these lines about the need of immediate action by the government to introduce the cabinet as the lack of cabinet has given birth to so many problems in the country. The worst effected part of the country are common people who are going from door to door for their grievances but are returned due to the absence of an authorized person in the office.

There are also reports that the absence of a cabinet of ministers and the internal disagreement between the heads of government have given way to a number of rumors resulting in the disappointment of some people from the future of the country. It is the reason why, a number of rich industrialists and businessmen have taken out their money from their businesses and local bank accounts and are thinking to transfer them outside the country. The recent news about a similar attempt of a number of businessmen and traders of Herat was also alarming as our economy cannot afford such tremors where the investment is already very limited and such doubts and fears may further exacerbate the situation of the country on the financial grounds.

Now that the process of the approval of new ministers is in progress and there has not been any kind of deadlock in this regard, we can pray and hope that these problems would be solved by the establishment of a new cabinet. In order to win the vote of the members of the lower house, the nominated ministers have presented bombastic plans for their upcoming tenure in case they are selected as ministers. In these plans, they have mentioned their plans to change the fate of the country and bring an end to the miseries of people. In almost all the developed nations of the world, it is a routine practice that new nominated ministers present their five-year plan on the floor of the house. The importance of these plans can be realized from the fact that ministers are rejected or selected on the basis of these plans. The accuracy, the validity and attention to the details of these plans exhibit the real talent and hidden qualities of a minister on the basis of which they win the vote of confidence of the representatives of people. However, in case of Afghanistan, it has not been so much successful. Although a number of ministers in the previous cabinets also came up with their plans but these plans were forgotten soon after they got the vote of confidence of the parliamentarians and we have hardly seen any minister achieving the targets mentioned in these plans. More or less is the case with the plans and targets of the present ministers. According to a number of parliamentarians, the plans and targets of the nominated ministers are really glowing and bombastic but majority of these plans are not practicable. A large number of plans and projects have been mentioned by the nominated ministers that our country neither has the budget nor the manpower and other capacity to turn them into reality. In the same manner, majority of the ministers have failed to give any kind of schedule for the completion of the projects mentioned in their plans. Although a large number of tasks and targets have been mentioned but none of them have specified any kind of deadline for the completion of these tasks. In such circumstances, it is felt that these plans would also turn out like the past plans and projects of the ministers that were presented to the house to win the vote of the parliamentarians but they were never going to turn into reality.

In the presence of above facts, it may not be wise to pin much hopes from the new cabinet but it is still the blessing of the democracy that a lame and weak democracy functions comparatively better than any other form of government. Another good factor is the presence of a large number of new faces who have been selected on the basis of merit. In the new cabinet, a number of new ministers have been introduced who are highly educated and have sufficient experience of working on international arena. Keeping aside all our fears and reservations, let us hope the best from this cabinet and the unity government as it stands as our last hope from the future of this country.



Why Celebrate 550 Years of Kazakh Statehood?

By Hadi Ahmadi

What does the name "Kazakhstan" mean? There was a discussion a year ago about the President's proposal to consider renaming the country "Kazakh Yeli". The great monument on Independence Square in Astana actually bears that name. And "Kazakh Yeli" actually means "the land of Kazakhs" or "Kazakhstan". Just as Deutschland, Poland, Finland and Thailand is a simple description of who, mostly, lives in each country. In fact, "Kazakhstan" has exactly the same meaning as "Kazakh Yeli", but in Persian (with "stan" meaning land). So where did this name of the sovereign state, which has been a member of the United Nations for the last 23 years, come from? History textbooks tell us that the first use of the word "Kazakh" dates back to the late 13th century. It is considered to be of Turkic origin and means "a free man", i.e. "someone who left his tribe or clan to live a life of an adventurer." Many scholars believe that Russian word for "Kazakh" meaning "Cossack" most likely originated from the same word. When back in 1459 several clans followed Sultans Kerey and Zhanibek in defiance of Khan Abulkhair Sheibanid, the powerful ruler of "nomadic Uzbeks", and migrated out of their native land to the valleys of rivers Shu and Talas, they were called "Kazakhs", in the pejorative meaning of being "outsiders". The union of tribes led by Kerey and Zhanibek quickly grew in numbers and strength throughout 1460s and 1470s, "Kazakh" gradually became a name associated with the people behind the new military force and, subsequently, the name of the state that developed from it. The key source on Kazakh khanate's early history - Mirza Mukhammad Khaidar Douglat's study "Tarih-i Rashidi", written between 1541 and 1546, labelled the new state "doulat-i kazak" (the Kazakh state). For a few decades in the late 15th century and the first decade of the 16th century, the heirs of Abulkhair Khan Sheibanid, or Uzbeks as they were known then, challenged the legitimacy of the Kazakh rulers' claim to the title of khan. Unsuccessful in these efforts, they instead conquered the fertile lands between the Central Asia's two largest rivers Syr Darya and Amu Darya, known from the earliest times to the Iranians as "the lands beyond the river (Amu Dariya)" or Maverannakhr in the Arabic language. Having settled there, the Sheibanids dropped their ambition to "punish" their "rebellious" cousins. From around 1510, and well into the mid-19th century, the territory to the north of the agricultural lands of Syr Darya valley, were ruled by those who claimed the title of "khan" and lineage from Kerey and Zhanibek, and thus from Genghis Khan. That those rulers were recognised as "legitimate" holders of the title is confirmed by the Russian colonial administration's acceptance of the practice, long after most Kazakh clans and their leaders came under the Tsar's protectorate in mid-18th century, and well into the first quarter of 19th century (the reforms of 1822-1824 cancelled the administrative references to Kazakh Khans, although in 1841-1847 the rebellious sultan Kenessary Kassymuly was recognised by most Kazakhs as their Khan).

It was around 1562 when the Kazakh khanate first became known in Western Europe. It appeared as "Cassackia" on a map drawn by Anthony Jenkinson, an English diplomat and traveller, to fill in the area between "Tashkent" and "Siberia". Even if Jenkinson never visited this part of the Great Steppe, he was likely to learn about the Kazakh khanate from the Russians, as he was the English Crown's first ambassador to Moscow during the time of Tsar Ivan the Terrible. A state of nomadic people has notable differences from that of a people with settled populations inhabiting towns and villages. Because of the nature of their economy, the nomads did not have much access to writing materials to document their everyday lives. This, of course, hampered the development of a proper tax system to fund the functioning of the administration. It also explains why there are fewer historical sources shedding light on the developments in nomadic states like the Kazakh khanate. However, a rich oral tradition flourished and the Kazakh language now has few regional differences, despite more than 3,000 kilometres of distance separating western and eastern Kazakhs and more than 1,500 kilometres those living in northern and southern parts.

There was also less division of labour in nomadic societies. Because nomads do not live in settlements, there were no schools with specialised education. Enforcement of court decisions was problematic and was often based on voluntary acceptance of the punishment since there were no prisons and plenty of space into which to escape. Nor did a permanent army exist. The reality was leaders had little difficulty in quickly assembling a capable military force in case of a conflict or a war. These factors naturally proved to be historical weaknesses that eventually led to the end of nomadic states between 17th and 19th centuries. The settled populations were more advanced and more powerful. But this does not deny the nomadic political entities their status as states. In the case of Kazakhs, between 1465 and 1822, there was a distinct population of "Kazakhs", whose rulers held the

titles of "khans." They were recognised descendants of the history's most powerful conqueror, Genghis Khan, with legitimacy to rule. This history shows the statehood of the "Kazakh people".

Today most members of the United Nations are nation-states. The issue of "nation" is a more complicated and nuanced than a "state". It will most likely remain a subject of heated academic debate for the foreseeable future and, unfortunately, will continue to be politicised. Kazakhstan, as most other political entities in the world, positions itself as a "nation-state." The preamble of its Constitution begins with the statement, "We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, [are] creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh land." So the nation of Kazakhstan includes the entire population, which has lived through historic experiences that have united "the people of Kazakhstan". The clear reference to the "indigenous" Kazakh land links the modern state with its predecessor, the Kazakh khanate. According to Ernest Gellner, the definition of nationalism is "primarily a political principle, which holds that political and national unit should be congruent." Gellner relied on German sociologist Max Weber's definition of state, i.e. "political unit", as an agency which has a monopoly of "legitimate violence" in a certain territory. If we have a political unit of "The Republic of Kazakhstan", what is a "national unit"? It is clear that the initial national unit that created the very idea of Kazakhstan were the ethnic Kazakhs.

There is an argument, though not particularly mainstream, that the political unit of Kazakhstan is not congruent with the national one. It claims that Kazakhstan's contemporary borders are artificial and were simply drawn up by Bolsheviks, while the nation of "Kazakhs" was artificially modelled on Stalin's imagination of "national policies". But it is hard to see what the evidence to support this view is.

It is true, of course, that many modern nations in Asia and Africa bear traces of purposeful modelling along the lines drawn from the 19th century European and American experiences of nation-building. But a nation is rarely sustainable without some "ethnic" origins - a bond through people who have inhabited the particular territory for generations and feel connected to the land. Otherwise, the attempt to create a nation-state is most likely to fail.

This bond is what helps define the modern nation of Kazakhstan. It was "modelled" to reflect the living historical bond with the Kazakh people and their heritage. Borders of the nation with this name took shape mainly in 1920s when the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created. The borders may have been drawn in Moscow but the decisions came after protracted debates involving the representatives of local communists. These included former members of the Alash Orda "national(ist)" movement, which rallied in 1917-1919 for the creation of territorial autonomy for Kazakhs within a new democratic statehood of Russia. The borders they proposed were based on the most relevant demographic and statistical data of the time, such as the census of the Russian Empire's population in 1897. According to this census, speakers of "Kirgiz-Kaisak", - the Kazakh language - numbered more than 4 million people at the time and constituted more than 80% of the areas within the "artificial" borders of contemporary Kazakhstan. So part of the reason for Kazakhstan's politically stable development must be due to this congruence between the "national" and "political" units, created by the Soviets in the early 1920s. The 20th century, however, has turned Kazakhstan into a multiethnic, multicultural society that it is today. A major change in the country's demographic structure was shaped by several waves of mainly voluntary, economically motivated migrations of Slavic (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians) and some Turkic groups (Tatars, Uighur, Uzbeks), along with the Stalin era's involuntary resettlements of Germans, Poles, Koreans, Chechens, and other Caucasian peoples. Kazakhstan's good fortune is that, despite these shake-ups, these diverse groups have lived in harmony with each other.

The country has experienced no major conflict along ethnic or religious lines. Moreover, the hardships of forced collectivisation, being part of the Soviet Union's grand war effort against Nazi Germany, post-war reconstruction, and then the break-up of the USSR and the difficult adaptation to a free market economy that followed, all brought the people of different ethnicities closer together, strengthening tolerance and the need for mutual understanding and solidarity. These challenges have helped unite them into a single group - "the people of Kazakhstan". Whether you call it a "Kazakh nation", in line with international thesaurus, is a matter of a secondary importance. Then why at all celebrate the Kazakh khanate's anniversary? For the same reason people mark anniversaries of a major past event all around the world. It is an opportunity to remind ourselves of our background, reflect on the journey of our culture and strengthen the understanding of who we are. The celebration of 550 years of the Kazakh khanate will help further unite all of us who chose to live in the land of the Kazakhs as one "people of Kazakhstan" and will strengthen our links with this land.

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