

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



February 19, 2017

No Clarity about Parliamentary Elections

One of the most important elements of a democratic system is elections. Timely and regular elections ensure smooth functioning of a democratic system. However, if the elections are not held on time within a political system, there are many possibilities that the overall system collapses and becomes instable and even illegitimate. Therefore, it is necessary that a government and the relevant authorities within a democracy must strive to hold all the elections as suggested by the constitution of the country. Otherwise, there will not be any reliability of the constitutions and there will not be any chances of changing the government or the parliament as per the people's will. And, democracy, in that case, will not remain a democracy in a true sense.

Afghanistan is also a country that claims to be democratic but, unfortunately, it has not been able to conduct elections that may qualify to be free and transparent and now it is suffering from incapacity to hold its parliamentary elections though the tenure of the parliament has expired for more than a year now. The Wolesi Jirga was elected in September 2010 and it had completed its legal tenure on 21st June, 2015. As per the constitution of the country, the election had to be conducted 30-60 days before the expiry of the Parliament, but that did not happen and the parliament's tenure was extended for one year. Moreover, the Wolesi Jirga passed a resolution in its own favour, extending its tenure till the next parliamentary election.

President Ashraf Ghani also passed a decree extending the tenure of the Wolesi Jirga till the next election without mentioning any particular date for the election. It is important to see whether these developments were as per the Afghan constitution. In accordance to the constitution, there are two legal ways to extend the tenure of the parliament; first, "Loya Jirga should be convened to decide on issues related to independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity as well as supreme national interests" and second, in article 147, it states that "If the presidential term or the legislative term of the National Assembly expires during the state of emergency, the new general elections shall be postponed, and the presidential as well as parliamentary terms shall extend up to four months. If the state of emergency continues for more than four months, the President shall call the Loya Jirga which will decide to further delay the elections or compels the President to hold elections, what may be the situations of the country. Within two months after the termination of the state of emergency, elections shall be held".

Definitely, the situation, when the tenure of the parliament was extended, was not an emergency situation; neither, the extension given to the parliament was of four months. Moreover, there was no Loya Jirga called to debate the extension of the parliament or the delay of the elections. It is really unfortunate to see that the political institutions that should promote democracy and protect the constitution the most are themselves involved in violating it. No democracy can flourish without the dominance of its constitution and without the regular and consistent elections. Unfortunately, the Afghan democracy has to wait for its parliamentary election for the time being.

One of the major hurdles in the parliamentary elections was the election reforms that were promised but were not introduced on time. In the presidential election there were serious allegations of fraud and inconsistencies, which ultimately resulted in conflicts between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah. After various discussions and assistance from the US, both agreed to form National Unity Government (NUG) and bring about necessary reforms in electoral institutions, their roles and responsibilities and at the same time in the overall process before the parliamentary elections. However, no major work was done in that regard on time.

On the other hand, there was no consensus regarding the shortcomings in the election institutions and processes. It was only feasible to suggest reforms when the real issues were identified and agreed upon. There seemed to be great differences in the opinion of the president and the CEO in this regard. Both considered different issues as the top priority. And some of the controversies are still present. On the other hand, Afghanistan Independent Election Commission (IEC) has been suffering from lack of authority and at the same time capacity. IEC secretary and spokesman, Gula Jan Abdul Badi Sayyad said on Saturday, February 18 that IEC would send its outline for the holding of Afghanistan's elections to the government in the next day or two.

He also mentioned that once the first outline about election polling stations was approved, IEC would prepare the voters rolls which they were already working on.

On the other hand, government has said the election schedule would be announced in one month. In fact, there is no clear idea about when the election will be held. Meanwhile, the security and political situations do not seem under control. Therefore, it is very difficult to see that the promises being made by IEC and the government would be fulfilled on time. For Afghanistan it is really vital that the parliamentary election should be held in immediately as it would help it in bringing about some political stability at a time when the country is going through serious security challenges and political instability.

Will The Blame Game Mitigate Challenges?

By Hujjatullah Zia

Following the Thursday's suicide bombing in the southern Sindh province, which killed and wounded hundreds of people, Pakistani officials lashed out at Afghanistan stating that the militants organized the attacks from across the border. Warring factions, including the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), carry out deadly attacks against Afghan-Pak nations. The individuals suffer severely on the basis of their color and creed. Afghan people, however, are believed to bear and brunt of militancy within the past two years and militancy is most likely to continue unabated.

The mistrust and tension between Kabul and Islamabad were engendered as a result of the Taliban's intensified attacks against the National Unity Government (NUG). After the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour on late May, 2016 in Baluchistan, the Taliban led by Mullah Haibatullah inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan nation. Believing that the attacks were orchestrated from Pakistan, Afghan officials urged Islamabad to destroy the sanctuaries of the Taliban without dividing them into "bad" and "good" groups.

The relations further tensed following Ashraf Ghani's tirade against Pakistan and his negative answer to its financial aid at the Heart of Asia Conference in the northern Indian city of Amritsar. Ghani said that Taliban insurgency would not survive a month if it lost its sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan, urging it to take on militant groups on its soil instead of giving Kabul financial aid. At a NATO summit in Warsaw, he also pointed out regarding Islamabad that its "dangerous distinction between good and bad terrorists is being maintained in practice".

It goes without saying that the founder of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011 and report released that Mullah Omar passed away in 2013 in the Pakistani city of Karachi. In the meantime, Afghan officials said that the Taliban fighters are treated in Pakistani hospitals after being wounded in battles.

To one's surprise, Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa called US General John Nicholson, commander of Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, and said that continued acts of terrorism in Pakistan from Afghanistan are testing the current policy of cross border restraint. General Bajwa said most of the incidents of terrorism in Pakistan are claimed by terrorist organizations with their leadership hiding in Afghanistan.

Lashing out at Afghanistan, which is the main victim of terrorism, is very ridiculous and irrational. Perhaps, it is done with a view to redirecting the world's attention towards Afghanistan or simply vents her anger at this country. Needless

to say, Afghan soldiers paid high sacrifices in combating terrorism and also inflicted heavy casualties on militant fighters. Condemning the recent terrorist attacks in Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Ghani said that Afghan government had proved its honesty and commitment in fight against terrorism and add, "Honesty and the will to fight against terrorism will prevent terrorists from carrying out their subversive activities in any country".

However, Islamabad's right decision is its military attack on terrorist hideouts. The Pakistani army reportedly attacked the alleged training camp of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar located near the Pak-Afghan border in areas adjacent to Mohmand and Khyber Agency and destroyed the compound and four other hideouts of suspected terrorists. It would be better if this operation had been carried out before the Sehwan incident. In other words, Pakistan will have to adopt offensive strategy rather than defensive one.

Terrorism is a regional and global issue which has involved the entire world. From the declaration of the caliphate until early 2016, some 90 terrorist attacks were either carried out or inspired by ISIL in 21 countries around the globe, from California to Sydney, with an estimated 1,400 victims killed. The responsibility for the February 14 attack in Sehwan was also claimed by the ISIL group which has changed into a highly serious threat in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Terrorist networks, which operate both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, should not be able to compound tension between the two countries. The blame game and harsh rhetoric will only widen the gap. The formation of ISIL-K close to Afghan-Pak border is a serious threat and loyalists to ISIL group carry out sporadic attack against both Kabul and Islamabad governments. This group played highly destructive role in Afghanistan last year and beheaded the ethnic minority group on the grounds of their creed and color.

To put it succinctly, the ISIL group gained firm foothold in both the countries. It is an undisputable fact that many warring factions operate in Pakistan and the most prominent groups are Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan which have carried out recent killings in Pakistan. To eradicate terrorism, Islamabad will have to find out and abolish their headquarters.

Moreover, the seminaries are potential threat to Pakistan and many militants are believed to be trained and organize attacks there.

So, there are some seminaries, in Pakistan, which spread radicalism through poisoning the minds of the teenagers, who come from poor families.

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Restoring Faith in Globalization

By Carl Bildt

I must confess that I am a firm believer in the benefits of globalization. To my mind, the gradual interlinking of regions, countries, and people is the most profoundly positive development of our time.

But a populist has now assumed the United States presidency by campaigning on a platform of stark economic nationalism and protectionism. And in many countries, public discourse is dominated by talk of globalization's alleged "losers," and the perceived need for new policies to stem the rise of populist discontent.

When I was born, the world's population was 2.5 billion. I vividly recall a time in my life when many people feared that starvation would soon run rampant, gaps between the rich and poor would grow ever wider, and everything would eventually come crashing down.

We now live in a world with 7.5 billion people, and yet the share of people living in absolute poverty has declined rapidly, while the gap between rich and poor countries has steadily closed. Around the world, average life expectancy has increased from 48 to 71 years - albeit with significant differences between countries - and overall per capita income has grown by 500%.

Just looking back at the last 25 years, one could argue that humanity has had its best quarter-century ever. Since 1990, the share of people living in extreme poverty in the developing world has fallen from 47% to 14%, and child mortality - a critical indicator - has been halved. The world has never seen anything like this before.

A similarly bright picture emerges from other indicators. Fewer people are dying on battlefields than during previous periods for which we have data; and, at least until a few years ago, the share of people living under more or less representative governments was gradually increasing.

This spectacular progress has been driven partly by advances in science and technology. But it owes at least as much to increased economic interaction through trade and investment, and to the overarching liberal order that has enabled these positive developments. In short, globalization has been the single most important force behind decades of progress.

These days, trade is often wrongly blamed for shuttering factories and displacing workers in developed countries.

But, in reality, the disappearance of older industries stems primarily from new technologies that have improved productivity and expanded the wealth of our societies. Likewise, rising inequality, real or imagined, has far more to do with technology than with trade.

To be sure, there are not as many farmers today as in past decades or centuries; Lancashire's cotton mills, Pittsburgh's steel plants, and Duisburg's coal mines have closed; and there are far fewer workers in Northern Sweden's vast forests. The children of those employed in these industries now often head for the lights of rapidly expanding cities, where

they fill jobs that could scarcely have been imagined just a few decades ago.

For most people around the world, life before globalization was poor, brutal, and short. And yet today's anti-globalists have turned nostalgia into a rallying cry. They want to make America - or Russia, or Islam - "great again." Each may be rallying against the others; but all are rallying against globalization.

Economic conditions were certainly less favorable in the years following the 2008 financial crisis, but now employment and economic growth are rebounding pretty much everywhere. Real (inflation-adjusted) GDP has been rising for 15 consecutive quarters in the eurozone, and all European Union economies are expected to grow in the next few years. Meanwhile, the US economy is already doing well - unemployment is below 5% and real incomes are rising.

Of course, many societies are undeniably experiencing a growing sense of cultural insecurity, not least because many people have been led to believe that external forces such as migration are eroding traditional sources of peace and stability. They are told that a return to tribalism in one form or another is a readily available coping mechanism.

Their mythical tribe was great in some mythical past, so why not try to recreate it? Such thinking poses a serious threat to the world's most vulnerable people.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to eliminate extreme poverty worldwide by 2030 is entirely dependent on continued economic growth through trade, technological innovation, and international cooperation. Erecting trade barriers, engaging in digital mercantilism, and generally undermining the liberal world order will severely harm the extreme poor in Africa and other underdeveloped regions, while doing nothing to help coal miners in West Virginia. The strong will always manage, but the weak will bear the burden of a nostalgic protectionism that erodes the benefits of globalization.

At the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos this year, Chinese President Xi Jinping was the one extolling the virtues of globalization, while many Western business leaders wandered the halls trying to sound concerned for the supposed losers of the process.

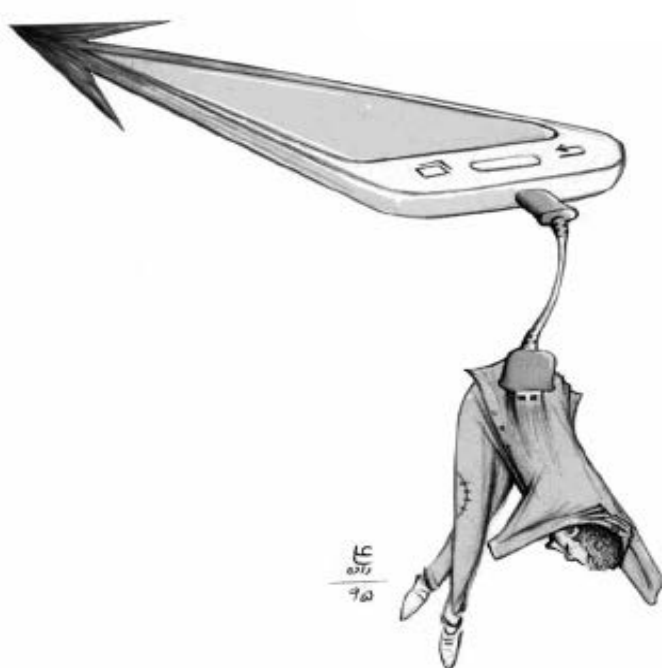
The communists are keeping the globalization faith; but the capitalists seem to have lost theirs.

This is bizarre - and entirely out of sync with past performance and current facts. We have every reason to be confident in a process that has delivered more prosperity to more people than anyone could have dreamed of just a few decades ago.

We must not be shy in defending globalization and combating reactionary nostalgia.

We can have a brighter future - but only if we don't seek it in the past. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.



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