

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



January 15, 2018

Consequences of Releasing Hizb-e-Islami's Prisoners

The government of Afghanistan has released 75 of Hizb-e-Islami's (Hekmatyar branch) members who were sentenced to 20 years by court.

These individuals who are released in accordance to the reconciliation agreement set out between Hizb-e-Islami and the government, were sentenced by court to a maximum of 20 years based on their crimes of disruption of internal and external security. Release of these prisoners have been met with different reactions in the press and social media.

The public, political and military experts have expressed their concerns from many perspectives, pondering and considering which can prove beneficial in decision making in similar cases in future.

Many analysts are concerned that Hizb-e-Islami's list contains names of individuals who were previously affiliated with either Taliban or Daesh (ISIS) and were captured from the battle fields while they were fighting the Afghan army.

Therefore, releasing these individuals is not release of Hizb-e-Islami's prisoners but in fact it is release of individuals affiliated with Taliban and Daesh.

It is said that some of these prisoners who are released have introduced themselves as members of Taliban and now Hizb-e-Islami insists that these individuals belong to Hizb-e-Islami and must be released as per the agreement.

The reality of war in Afghanistan is such that there is no specific and fix division of territories under control of Taliban, Daesh or Hizb-e-Islami which makes it difficult to differentiate between members of these militias. For example, in some areas where militias were affiliated with Hizb-e-Islami, suddenly joined the Taliban and fought against the government under the Taliban flag.

In some other areas the opposite might have taken place. Therefore, it is not unlikely that among those released or in the list given by Hizb-e-Islami, there might be individuals that are affiliated with the extremist Taliban or Daesh group.

Another issue that must be kept in mind is that these individuals except committing general crimes might have violated other people's rights too and it is possible that some of them might have individual's plaintiffs in that case their release would mean turning a blind eye to law and the rights of those who are affected.

People want to know if there is a clause in the agreement between Government and Hizb-e-Islami, that besides releasing prisoners of Hizb-e-Islami also asks for a guarantee from the Hizb about the actions of their members after their release.

The Afghan Government must ensure that the radical groups do not use Hizb e-Islami as a tool to increase their influence in the government and undermine the emerging democratic processes in the country.

Principally, just like Hizb-e-Islami insists on the affiliation of the prisoners with Hizb and on their release, they must also feel themselves responsible to their actions after release.

According to Hizb-e-Islami's spokesmen around 2,000 imprisoned members of this party have been identified and listed which are to be released according to the peace agreement. Although government officials have said that cases of each prisoner will be scrutinized at different security and intelligence levels and finally they will be released on the order of the president. But, because of the unhealthy political processes and due to the connivances that have taken place in the past, release of criminal prisoners and prisoners affiliated with Taliban and Daesh (ISIS) under the name of Hizb-e-Islami members, doesn't seem unlikely.

Therefore, this is the government's duty to identify Hizb-e-Islami's prisoners with discretion and differentiate the type of crime that they have committed, identify their ideological leanings, and behavior and release only that group of prisoners who:

First of all, their affiliated with Hizb-e-Islami is unquestionable. Secondly, they should not have personal plaintiffs. Thirdly, there should be an assurance that they would not get armed and fight against the government again. If in future, any of these individuals get involved in crime and cooperate in any way with terrorist groups, Afghan people will consider the government and Hizb-e-Islami responsible for consequences of their behaviors.



The Name of the New Chinese Ambassador Means Pine Tree: He Will Help Afghanistan Export More Pine Nuts to China

By Liu Jinsong

On January 14th, H.E Mr Liu Jinsong, the new Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan, accepted our written interview. Ambassador Liu said he comes from Chinese Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where is next to Afghanistan. He knows and respects Afghan traditions and will try his best to promote the development of China-Afghan relations. Ambassador Liu said, he took the Ariana flight to Kabul from Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. It took him only 3 hours which shows how close the two countries are. Last year, nearly 10,000 Afghans went to China.

There were many Afghan people on the Ariana flight which indicates the increase of our people-to-people exchanges. Before going to University at the age of 17, Ambassador Liu lived in Urumqi with lots of Muslim friends and classmates around, so he is familiar and respects the Muslim traditions. Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is adjacent to Afghanistan, many people on both sides are relatives, and many Afghan businessmen are doing business there. The Ambassador said Afghanistan had been known to him as China's good neighbor, good friend and good partner when he was very young. The Ambassador said, he arrived in Kabul on 3rd January and was arranged to present his credence to H.E. President Ghani in less than one week after his arrival, which made his credence the first one accepted by H.E. President Ghani in 2018. The president said with delight that this should be a sign for good fortune. This special arrangement reflects the depth of the China-Afghanistan relations, shows the great importance attached by the Afghanistan to China and their passion to Afghan-China cooperation.

The Ambassador said, the ancient Silk Road connected China and Afghanistan closely. Zhang Qian, one of the most famous envoys in Chinese history, arrived in Afghanistan more than 2,000 years ago. Since then, many wise men and businessmen from Afghanistan traveled to China, made contribution to China's economic and cultural development. In ancient Chinese books, it also recorded the splendor of ancient Afghanistan civilization.

Today, China and Afghanistan are jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative, which will revive the Silk Road, make it more beautiful, and contribute a shared future of the two countries. The geographical and resource advantages of Afghanistan will be fully fulfilled. Afghanistan will be one of the connectivity hubs for the region and Afghan people will also enjoy more benefits.

The Ambassador said, a lot of Afghan friends want to export more products to China, such as carpets, marbles, pomegranates, saffron and pine nuts. He had a positive attitude to this, and joked that he has a special love to pine nuts for his own name means pine tree in Chinese language.

The First China Import and Export will be held in Shanghai by the end of this year, hoping Afghan friends can catch up this opportunity. The Ambassador said, the Prophet Muhammad has a saying in the Koran that Seek knowledge even as far away as China. There is also a proverb in Afghanistan, saying Friendship is the path of a thousand years. The Silk Road is not only a road for knowledge and business but also a road for friendship. The Ambassador said

that he came to here to promote the mutual-learning of the two peoples, and making friends with the whole society in Afghanistan, inheriting and pushing forward the long-standing friendship between China and Afghanistan. To be specific, it can be elaborated as four "to promote", that are to promote China-Afghanistan Strategic Cooperative Partnership, especially high-level visits and non-governmental exchanges, to promote the integration with the Belt and Road Initiative and Afghanistan's development strategy, to promote practical cooperation projects in all fields between China and Afghanistan, to help Afghanistan to promote the peace reconciliation and reconstruction process with Afghan led and Afghan owned principle, as well as the relationship between Afghanistan and its neighbors.

The Ambassador said his greatest hobby is reading. Before he came to Afghanistan, he surprisingly found Chairman Mao used to saying a book that Afghanistan is a heroic country that has never given in. China and Afghanistan are friendly countries. China does not want to harm Afghanistan. Afghanistan does not want to harm China. The two countries always support each other.

This remark profoundly reflects the Chinese people's feelings to the Afghan people. China is a large country; however, it has never bullied Afghanistan, never intervened Afghan internal affairs, never sought geopolitical interests or agents in Afghanistan. Instead, it upholds the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness, treat Afghanistan equally and help the Afghan people to achieve peace and reconstruction wholeheartedly. After he assumed office, there are Afghan friends who sincerely told him that the Afghan people trust China so much that you can say "China's friends are friends of Afghanistan. China's enemies are enemies of Afghanistan". He is deeply moved by the remark.

The Ambassador further pointed out that poverty, backwardness and terrorism are common enemies to China and Afghanistan. Diminishing these enemies requires sincere international cooperation, especially cooperation between neighboring countries. It is not a solution to acts willfully and accuses each other.

The people of China and Afghanistan are both victims of terrorism. He grew up in Xinjiang, and has a keenly-felt pain to terrorists, shared the suffering and sacrifices afforded by Afghans. Both China and Afghanistan oppose terrorism in all its forms and advocate the eradication of the root causes of terrorism, taking comprehensive policies to tackle both the symptoms and root causes.

At last, the Ambassador said, he likes listening to stories, and also telling stories. The Arabic story named The Thousand and One Nights is widely known in China, however, the old and new stories about China-Afghanistan friendship takes even more than one thousand and one nights to elaborate.

During these days, Ambassador Liu is moved by the story of Mr. Ali who safeguards the Chinese Embassy during the war, the story of Chinese workers and volunteers who gain the trust of Bamyani people, the story of Afghan businessmen who help the locals in Yiwu, China, and also the story of Afghan students' love story in China. Ambassador Liu hopes to hear nice stories every day, and also contributes more nice stories to China-Afghanistan friendship.

Liu Jinsong, the new Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan

Zoo Gardens as Window of Exploration, Education And Knowledge for the Public

By Saikat Kumar Basu

Zoological gardens or zoo gardens has a nostalgic connection to most of our lives. There are hardly any kids these days where the family has not made stop at the zoo for exploring the vibrant and divergent animal life at some point of his/her life. Zoos have strong impacts on all school going kids in knowing about mysterious animal life and behavior; and also to appreciate the diversity of our natural world. Several schools have programs to take students to the zoos to introduce them to the spectacular diversity of animal life, to connect the kids to the natural world outside the four walls of the classroom in a practical nature based laboratory as well as an eye opener with opportunities of supervised exploration and gathering knowledge about our diverse natural world. Several countries include visit to zoos with various objectives at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The basic idea however is the same; and that is to respect and appreciate the diversity of life that we often forget in the din and bustle of our busy daily life.

Private zoos across different continents were in fact first established by the existing monarchy of the land, aristocrats, noblemen, influential courtesans and rich social elites as a part of their proud and exquisite collection of wild animals, birds and reptiles. Hence credit must be given to the monarchy and other elites of the society in establishing and maintaining the first of its kind of private zoos.

The process was initiated in Europe and then spread to the rest of the world over time during the post colonial era. Many of these zoos were stocked with animals from different continents either by explorers and travelers or through armed campaigns during pre colonial era; and through army personnel, adventurers, explorers, hunters and researchers during the colonial and post colonial period.

However, it is important to remember that most zoos however started with a single point agenda; and that has been entertainment of the public primarily.

Zoo management has been at its infancy with very little or almost no proper care for the animals housed in congested and over crowded cages. Appropriate veterinary diagnostics and treatments as well as modern vet medications were not available for the inmates. Many precious animals, birds and reptiles died during transportation and due to lack of suitable care, proper diet and nutrition or any facilities for modern animal care.

But out of this chaos and confusion, modern zoo gardens got their basic foundation laid and established over few centuries to trans-

form into world class public zoos from their initial humble beginning as private zoos for the aristocrats. Today, modern zoos around the world have evolved into different specialized forms such as zoological parks or gardens, fresh water and marine aquariums, eco parks, animal theme parks, vivarium, reptile houses, snake parks, animal laboratories for study of animal physiology and animal behavior, aviaries, animal nurseries and hatcheries, nature interpretation centers, animal rescue and rehabilitation centers, butterfly gardens, insect gardens, open air zoo, captive breeding centers, animal education and interpretation centers to mention only a handful.

The zoos and aquariums around the world are now governed by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park in Darjeeling, West Bengal is a member of WAZA. Otherwise, nodal central administrative units in individual country like the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) in India manage the zoo at the national level; following stringent international guidelines, protocol and procedures for zoos across the country. Zoo management has reached a new height now across the globe with respect to the management of zoo animals like housing them in artificial natural habitat like enclosures, better treatment for animals under captivity, zoo based breeding, modern veterinary treatment for sick or injured animals, catering to animal specific diet and nutrition, paying special attention to research on zoo animal physiology and behavior; and attempting to make zoo as an effective and efficient tool for public education and awareness rather than simple entertainment as in the past.

Zoos around the planet have now developed more into education and interpretation centers for wildlife, human-animal interaction platform; and for showcasing the spectacular global biodiversity. Zoos have travelled a long distance from the traditional agenda as showbiz into nature based education hub for the public to explore and educate themselves about nature, wildlife and biodiversity; and the value of natural world in our social and economic life.

Such institutions and organizations have big funding with support from the government and public to conduct captive breeding for many endangered species to be able to replenish the natural ecosystems which they represent.

The evolution of modern zoos from their traditional humble beginning is an inspirational story in itself. They have slowly undergone transformation from exhibitionism into knowledge centers with high focus on conservation.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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