

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



January 29, 2015

Voting for Cabinet Nominees

After more than three months of delay, President Ashraf Ghani in concurrence with Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and their deputies at last agreed on nominees for the cabinet and they also appeared in front of Parliament to present their plans for their proposed positions. However, out of 24 nominees, only 18 got the permission to present their priorities to the Wolesi Jirga while the rest were barred from speaking to the assembly for having dual nationality.

The 18 nominees who presented their plans and priorities only 8 got the approval from the MPs while the rest were rejected as they could not acquire 50% + 1 votes. The session of the assembly that approved the 8 nominees and rejected others comprised of 243 lawmakers who were present in the lower house on January 28.

The 8 approved candidates include Rahmatullah Nabil as the NDS Chief, who got 154 votes - he had previously served as Acting Intelligence Chief; Noorul Haq Ulumi as Interior Minister, who bagged 131 votes; Akil Hakimi as Finance Minister, who received 128 votes in his favor; Salahuddin Rabbani as Foreign Affairs Minister, who acquired 151 votes; Ferozuddin Feroz as Public Health Minister, who got the highest number of votes - 170; Syed Hussain Alami Balkhi received 134 votes in his favor as Minister of Refugees Affairs; Daud Shah Saba confirmed his position as Minister of Mines by bagging 146 votes; Eng. Naseer Ahmad Durrani acquired 145 votes as Minister of Rural Rehabilitation; and Faiz Mohammad Osmani as Haj and Religious Affairs Minister by getting 160 votes.

While the other 10 nominees - Gen Sher Mohammad Karimi nominee for Defense Minister, Barna Karimi nominee for Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Zarlnai Younusi Education Portfolio nominee, Kha-thira Afghan the Higher Education Minister nominee, Rahman Oghli Economy Minister nominee, Abbas Basir nominee for Public Works Minister, Faizullah Zaki nominee for Minister of Transportation, Qamaruddin Shinwari Borders and Tribal Affairs nominee, and Sardar Mohammad Rahimi nominee for Minister of Commerce and Industries could not get the required votes.

Now that only 8 of the total 24 nominees have been selected, a tiring process may follow and there are fears that again there would be delays and discussions in selecting new nominees and introducing them to the parliament. President and Chief Executive along with their deputies may once again involve in disagreements and the process may further get delayed, which will affect the functioning of the cabinet, which should have been formed by now and should have been working for the service of the people.

Afghanistan is one of the countries where efficiency is greatly required. It requires a cabinet that is functional and able to perform quickly and without delays. Different ministries must start working as soon as possible as delays have already cost them much. The prevailing insecurity in the country and even in the capital Kabul is largely because different ministries have leadership vacuum and do not have the capacity to make decisions and change the scenario. Another long process of selecting nominees may further hamper the formation of the cabinet and thus of the ministries.

On the other hand the MPs must also consider the requirements for the selection of better candidates for different ministries. The selection must not be based on their political considerations and they must cast their votes free of any sort of biasness and ethnic considerations. Unfortunately, in the first round of selection the neutrality and considerations for merit were not fully taken care of by some of the parliamentarians and their votes were based on ethnic sentiments and political lobbying.

It is an important aspect of democracy that the elections and selections should be based on meritocracy. MPs must never forget that their votes for the members of the cabinet are a responsibility that the nation has given to them. It is by dint of the votes of the people that they are in such a position; therefore, they should leave no stone unturned in making sure that their decisions are based on meritocracy and does not drag the country towards ethnic conflicts and disorder.

President Ashraf Ghani has hailed the decision of the parliament and has promised that the replacements to the rejected nominees would be soon announced but promises alone would not be enough. Actions have to be taken on urgent basis and the new nominees must be named without any further delay as it has already been a never ending and tiring process.

Afghan people want to see a functional cabinet as soon as possible. They had gone through miseries and voted in the election so that their desires and dreams of democracy should be turned into reality and a government should be formed

Afghanistan: Old Cars Market



Tolerance Leads to Peace and Security

By Hujjatullah Zia

Being stereotyped with dogmatic beliefs and blind faith in subterranean rooms of Madrasahs and adopting fractious attitudes towards the public creed will sacrifice tolerance. An orthodox interpretation of religion and rigid understanding of faith will pave the ground for violence and bloodshed. Fundamentalism will sterilize the minds so as neither absorb nor tolerate the logical arguments of others. The current Islamic radicals, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Nigeria reflect intolerance via violence and militancy in its true form. In short, tolerance will not grow in unfertilized minds of the religious extremists who smolder with overt partiality and prejudice. So as to practice tolerance, one's mind should be emptied from bias and discrimination.

Lack of religious tolerance will precipitate violence in a society - as the Islamic world is experiencing it bitterly. As a result, a large number of Afghan ethnic and religious minorities lost their life for the sake of their faith and creed under the Taliban. The Taliban's dogmatic faith and lack of tolerance led to national carnage across the country and yet Afghan citizens lose their lives in terrorist acts. Islamic militants claim impudently that only and only they practice the pure form of Islam and other Muslims' preach and practices are wrong and unacceptable!

However, their ostentatious acts of cruelty blemish Islam. How paradoxical it is to see that those who claim to support Islam are the very violators of Islamic law. Hence, their bogus claim is no more than shedding crocodile tear for religion. The poor religion is being stabbed in the back by its so-called proponents. Isn't it the story of the bear which killed its owner intending to repulse the stubborn fly disturbing him?

Ill-fatedly, tolerance lacks a certain conception in our society the same as other social and political concepts. For instance, freedom, democracy and human rights are considered western products by traditionalists. In other words, some believe that democracy and human rights are not acceptable in our society in their modern terms rather we have Islamic democracy and Islamic human rights. Those certain terms are being distorted in our society. Freedom and human rights, which is established on the basis of one's humanity irrespective of his/her race, color, gender, belief, etc, are defined clearly and disagreeing with them means agreeing with the opposite facts. The same is the case with tolerance, whoever denies it there is no other type of tolerance to practice upon.

The social and political tolerance will be practiced in a society where human rights are acceptable in their modern term and where all the sources of power will tolerate the citizens' belief, including the religious beliefs of minority groups, patiently. Honoring the beliefs and values of others means respecting the

inherent personality of mankind. Moreover, tolerance will rule in a society where the state supports freedoms not the truths. Thinkers should be provided with the opportunities to analyze the truths, and this sphere has to be kept out of the realm of government's intrusion. So, a society's writers and thinkers are supposed to discuss about the right and wrong issues in a secure and peaceful atmosphere. However, if the government becomes involved in such issues and support a particular interpretation, whether the issues are religious, political or philosophical, a true tolerance will no more exist in such a society. Since government is a source of great power, it will impose its interpretations on the nation - no matter if those interpretations are right or wrong. Hence, it will lead to violence or at least to surreptitious skirmish or schism among the opponent and proponent groups.

Likewise, tolerance will exist in a society where the freedom of expression rules to the extent of analyzing and criticizing the majority's religious and irreligious beliefs without a timorous feeling or falling under pressure. This issue is highly significant in a society where religion plays an integral role as in our society. To discuss about political-social tolerance in our society, we have to underline this issue. We will lack tolerance unless our thinkers and writers are allowed to talk critically of official and religious beliefs without any dilemma.

A religious society does not necessarily mean that the majority's religious beliefs be part of government's ideology and beyond any critiques. A religious society means that the citizens live as religious believers and arbitrators and to involve the updated religious values to political participation and those values be flexible to interpretations. In current age, democracy is the only popular form of government which leads to the growth and fertilization of religious values and experiences. Hence, political and social freedom and respecting human rights do not eventuate to the loss of religious values. A religious society can enjoy a democratic government.

We are supposed to tolerate all citizens, as they are, on the basis of being human irrespective of their beliefs, color, sex or creed. There live many people in our society with different religious and political mindsets and we live in a plural society and have to cherish pluralism via practicing tolerance in all aspects of our social life. Fundamentalism and dogmatic interpretations of religion, which close the door to tolerance, bore bitter fruit in Islamic world and in our society. Thus, to get rid of violence and terrorism, all citizens have to practice tolerance in social, political and religious spheres of life.

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Three Global Health Threats

By Jaime Sepulveda

The tragic Ebola outbreak in West Africa has underscored the imperative of strengthening health systems at both the national and global level. But, though Ebola has focused the world's attention on systemic shortcomings, the goal must be to combat the abiding epidemics that are quietly inflicting suffering and death on populations worldwide.

Ebola has undoubtedly wrought tremendous agony. But it is not the first - or the most devastating - pandemic the world has faced. In fact, smallpox is the deadliest disease known to humanity; until Edward Jenner developed the vaccine in 1796, it was the leading cause of death in Europe. Before its eradication in 1980, it killed an estimated 300-500 million people.

The Bubonic plague of the fourteenth century killed 75-100 million people - more than half of Europe's population. Nearly 75 million people, or 3-5% of the world's population, died in just a few months during the 1918 influenza pandemic - more than twice the number of people killed in World War I.

The world continues to grapple with HIV/AIDS, which has already caused more than 40 million deaths and infects a similar number of people today, with 95% of the epidemic's victims living in developing countries. Only when HIV/AIDS began to gain traction in advanced countries were highly effective anti-retroviral therapies developed - therapy that most of the poor people suffering from the disease could not access or afford.

Similarly, the failure of governments, multilateral organizations, and NGOs to respond quickly enough to the Ebola outbreak reflects the fact that the disease has ravaged poor countries. But, at a time of unprecedented global interconnectedness, everyone has a stake in ensuring that adequate health-care systems and structures are in place to address such a pandemic. Achieving this requires providing the needed investment; after all, effective national health systems and agile surveillance are the first lines of defense against outbreaks of disease.

At this point, Ebola is not only a health crisis, but also a humanitarian, economic, and political crisis. To be sure, some progress has been made. The United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response's "70/70/60" plan - to isolate 70% of Ebola patients and ensure that 70% of burials are conducted safely within 60 days - has largely been implemented, reducing the number of new cases considerably. But people are still suffering and dying - often owing to a lack of access to credible information or adequate treatment.

Of course, when it comes to safeguarding the health of populations, there is a fine line between protecting the public and impinging on individual rights. That is why all public-health interventions must focus first and foremost on scientific facts, and avoid emotional or panicked responses.

In this context, the imposition of mandatory quarantines on travelers from Ebola-affected countries was an obvious policy failure - just as they were when authorities tried to contain the Black

Death of 1350 in Europe or the Plague of London in 1665. Instead of wasting time on fear-based strategies, the international community must leverage human and financial resources to ensure fact-based, concerted, collective action. Such a united approach is possible; indeed, it has happened before.

At the turn of the century, the establishment of institutions like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, coincided with a renewed effort to improve global health. The UN's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals - which included four health-related targets, covering nutrition, maternal and child health, and infectious diseases - reflected a political consensus to improve health worldwide. This institutional architecture has facilitated considerable progress in many of these areas; for example, the under-five mortality rate has plummeted by 49% since 1990.

But there is far more to be done. In regions like Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, maternal and child health and infectious diseases remain priorities. In fact, the ten countries with the highest child mortality rates are all located in Sub-Saharan Africa; a baby born in West Africa is 30 times likelier to die before the age of five than one born in Western Europe.

Even within countries, massive inequalities remain. For example, there is a ten-fold difference in infant mortality between municipalities in the Mexican states of Guerrero and Nuevo Leon. Moreover, silent epidemics have taken hold, particularly in lower-income countries, as the combination of mega-trends like urbanization, population aging, obesity, sedentary lifestyles, smoking, and alcohol consumption has spurred the rise of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). For adults in most countries, cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease have become leading causes of disability and death.

Emerging infectious diseases like Ebola may be more compelling, but the health impact of chronic NCDs, not to mention their high and growing social and economic costs, is substantially larger. There is no time to waste. Policymakers must pursue aggressive action to curb the spread of risk factors like the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and obesogenic foods.

The world is facing a three-prong health challenge: We must build sustainable national and global health systems that can respond quickly and effectively to crises like Ebola; eliminate or control infectious diseases; and address the quietly rising epidemic of chronic NCDs. To succeed on all three fronts, we need sustained investment in health infrastructure, management, and personnel. Equality is key. This means improving access to health care and education. But it also means addressing the deeper social inequities that extend beyond the public-health agenda. In formulating the post-2015 development goals, world leaders must remember that health is a fundamental human right.

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