

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



June 05, 2016

Parliamentary Elections in Limbo

On June 22, the Afghan parliament will complete one year extension; however, it is sure that there would not be any parliamentary election before that time. The Wolesi Jirga was elected in September 2010 and it had completed its legal tenure on June 21, 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 is stated 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.

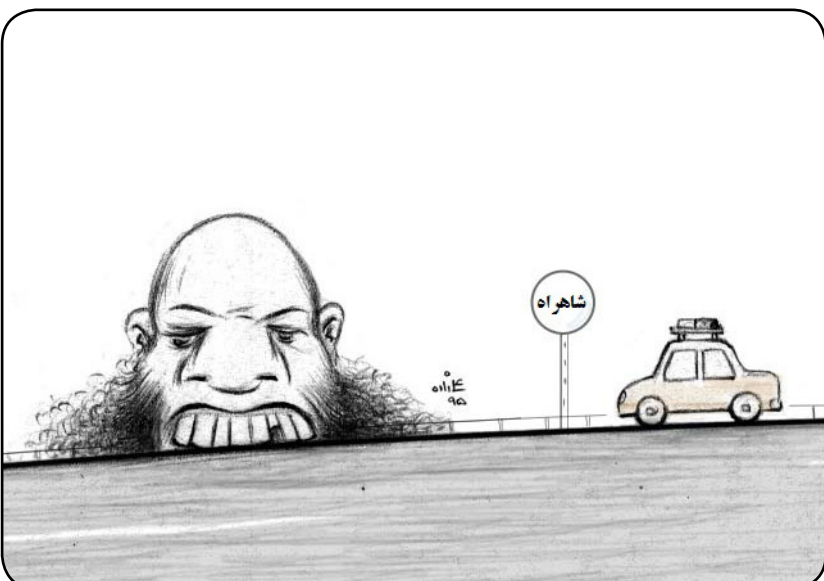
One of the major hurdles in the parliamentary elections was the election reforms that were promised but were not introduced on time. After 2014 presidential election, President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah after various discussions and assistance from the US, agreed to form National Unity Government (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. One of the reasons was basically the lack of attention and considerations that were devoted to the task. Over-burdening itself with other issues, NUG was not able to spare time for concentrating on electoral reforms.

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.

Now, that the reform decree is in the parliament, there seems to be differences among the parliament members about the reforms. Mohammad Abdoh, head of parliament's legal and judicial commission, said on Friday, June 03, that lawmakers seem to be divided over whether to approve the decree or reject it. He said that the views of 12 parliamentary commissions out of 15 commissions have been collected, but half of the commissions agree with the reform package and another half oppose it. Parliament should have decided the fate of the decree within a period of one month but that time has already passed and if now it rejects it, there will be serious consequences and it would be difficult to imagine the elections even in the ongoing year.

Analysts believe that there should be certain lobbying by the government so that the decree is passed through the parliament and some sort of developments are made for election. For Afghanistan it is really vital that the parliamentary election should be held in October as it would help it in bringing about some political stability at a time when the country is going through serious security challenges. However, insecurity itself will be a challenge for the election.

It is of important that Afghanistan does the basics well. A valuable suggestion comes through the Hague Institute for Global Justice in its article: Breaking Afghanistan's Election Crisis Cycle; Meaningful election reform, overseen by a truly independent IEC and backed by a vigorous, impartial IECC remains vital. Ideally, these procedural changes would be coupled with an electoral system that more faithfully translates popular preferences into electoral results. The use of closed-list proportional representation, for instance, could bolster the viability of political parties substantially, and more accurately reflect voter preferences... Afghanistan continues to face daunting political and economic issues, as well as a growing Taliban insurgency which openly challenges the state's authority. A sensible electoral system, combined with a well-constructed law on political parties, and well-executed credible elections could help jumpstart Afghanistan's flagging democracy and produce legitimate political leadership to start addressing those challenges.



The Greatest Muhammad Ali Passes Away

By Hujjatullah Zia

Reading indiscriminately on Friday, a title "Ali and Frazier" caught my attention and I went through it with great excitement. The story said that Ali and Frazier fought three times in the greatest matches of boxing history in the late 1970s. Although Ali was knocked to the ground during the first fight, he was declared the winner in second and third matches, in New York City and Manila - an exceptional fight in the heat and humidity of the Philippines. At the age of 25, Ali had already won 29 fights. "Incredible" I said and believed that perhaps there is no greater boxing story than the legendary fights between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

Just next day, I overheard that the heavyweight champion greatest-of-all-time Muhammad Ali died early Saturday morning after he was reportedly hospitalized with respiratory problems.

Muhammad Ali, born on January 17, 1942, an American professional boxer and generally considered the greatest heavyweight in the history of the sport. He was one of the most recognized sports figures of the 20th century. Ali, originally known as Cassius Clay, was first directed toward boxing by Louisville police officer and boxing coach Joe E. Martin, who encountered the 12-year-old fuming over a thief taking his bike. He told the officer he was going to "whup" the thief. The officer told him he better learn how to box first.

As a boxer, Ali won dozens of championships - notable among these were the first Liston fight, three with rival Joe Frazier and one with George Foreman - three heavyweight titles and an Olympics gold medal. During his first heavyweight championship against Sonny Liston in 1964 he declared himself "the greatest," a nickname that outlasted his boxing career. Shortly after that bout, Ali converted to Islam and changed his name.

Ali had a great personality and remained a prominent voice for civil rights causes long after his retirement in 1981 with a record of 56 wins, 37 by knockout, and five losses. A vocal proponent of the religion, he recently spoke out against Donald Trump over the candidate's proposed plan to ban Muslims from the country. "Speaking as someone who has never been accused of political correctness, I believe that our political leaders should use their position to bring understanding about the religion of Islam and clarify that these misguided murderers have perverted people's views on what Islam really is," a statement attributed to Ali said. "I am a Muslim and there is nothing Islamic about killing innocent people in Paris, San Bernardino, or anywhere else in the world. True Muslims know that the ruthless violence of

so-called Islamic militants goes against the very tenets of our religion," it added.

He became a symbol for black liberation during the 1960s and refused to fight in the Vietnam War on religious grounds stating publicly, "My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people; some poor, hungry people in the mud, for big powerful America, and shoot them for what? ... No Vietcong ever called me nigger." He was denied a boxing license in every state and stripped of his passport. As a result, he did not fight from March 1967 to October 1970, from ages 25 to almost 29, as his case worked its way through the appeal process.

The fact is that besides being a champion in the world of sport, he was a de facto hero in his social life who respected the rights and dignity of mankind. He raised his voice against injustice and cruelty. As a child, he joined boxing to punch the thief who snatched his right through stealing his bike. Therefore, he sought to live a free life as a real hero i.e. neither trample upon the people's life and liberty nor let others curtail his freedom. In other words, to consider Ali's life through religious or ethical perspective, he cherished morality and humanity to a great extent. He can be a role model for people, mainly for athletes to practice morality and have mercy on individuals despite being physically strong. In another item, one's physical strength should not outweigh his/her moral and spiritual strength. Through voicing against an act of injustice, he has a message for all, including the political influential, to practice morality in all aspects of life.

Ali was, reportedly, expecting a "brief stay" when news broke he had been hospitalized in Phoenix Thursday, June 02, 2016 with respiratory condition. But reports began circulating late Friday night that his condition had become "grave." His condition did not improve, and late on June 3, it was announced that Ali had died at the age of 74. May he rest in peace!

The world was saddened by Ali's demise and deemed him a prominent personality. Although Ali has passed away, his soul will remain eternal and he will remain hero for ever and for present and future generations. It is hoped that all athletes must learn from his morality and cherish manly characters inside and outside rings. It should be noted that man needs to nourish not only his body but also his soul, namely personality and human characteristics. At the end, I express my deep condolence, over his sad demise, to his family and his fans.

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Leveraging Islamic Finance for Sustainable Development

By Mahmoud Mohieldin

Roughly one-third of those suffering from extreme poverty worldwide live in member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In 21 of those 57 countries, fewer than half of the population has access to adequate sanitation. Four percent of infants born in these countries die before they reach the age of five.

Simply put, despite great potential, many OIC countries have struggled to achieve broad-based development. For many countries, the infamous "resource curse" is at work; in others, weak leadership and failed institutions are to blame. It does not help that the vast majority (some 71%) of the 125 million people affected by conflicts and natural disasters reside in OIC countries. Instability places enormous strain on national budgets.

But these countries have options. In particular, the capital that has accumulated in some of the OIC countries' financial systems could play an important role in helping them to meet their development goals - especially if Islamic finance is used to its full potential.

Islamic finance has important advantages over conventional financial products. Its prohibition of interest and requirement that investments be linked to the real economy, together with its approach to profit- and loss-sharing, add stability to the financial sector. Islamic finance also can enhance financial inclusion, as it incorporates people who, for cultural or religious reasons, are excluded from the traditional financial system. This is perhaps one reason why Islamic finance has been expanding at 10-12% per year over the last decade or so.

If Islamic finance is to play its full part in revitalizing and diversifying the economies of the OIC countries, governments will need to undertake important reforms. Topping the list is the need for stronger legal institutions that protect property rights and ensure that contracts are enforced. If people are to have full confidence in Islamic financial products, moreover, the industry will need to be standardized and regulated. National tax policies will also need to be tweaked, to prevent discrimination against Islamic financial instruments.

The World Bank Group is working with partners to help realize these reforms. Furthermore, it has introduced invest-

ment projects that use Islamic financing across the region. The World Bank Treasury has issued a variety of Islamic financial instruments, including two Sukuk (bonds that meet Islamic strictures on interest), which have raised \$700 million. Similarly, the Bank's private-sector arm, the International Financial Corporation, has established the IFC Sukuk Company, which issued \$100 million in trust certificates in 2015.

The Bank's political risk insurance arm, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), has provided a \$427 million Sharia-compliant investment guarantee for an infrastructure project in Djibouti and \$450 million in political risk insurance for a telecommunications investment in Indonesia. And, together with the Islamic Development Bank Group, the United Nations, and other donors, the World Bank has created a joint facility to assist the countries hardest hit by instability with concessional financing, which includes an Islamic-finance instrument for Lebanon and Jordan to help them bear the costs of supporting refugees from Syria.

New technology can play a vital role in making financial systems more inclusive, particularly for groups that face greater barriers to access. For example, some 90% of Syrian refugees have access to smart phones, through which they could access financial services. Efforts must be made to ensure that we make the most of such technologies.

Finally, there are humanitarian objectives. And, indeed, work is already underway to address how waqf (charitable endowments), zakat (the obligatory alms tax), and a variety of Islamic financial instruments can be channeled effectively and efficiently to meet humanitarian needs.

Islamic finance can help deliver much-needed solutions to the Muslim world's development challenges. Its ability to enhance financial stability, promote financial inclusion, and drive sustainable development could spark transformative change across the region.

To realize this potential, Islamic finance, no less than its conventional counterpart, needs an appropriate enabling environment, one characterized by a level playing field, an adequate regulatory framework, and effective partnerships. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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