

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



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Role of Youth in US Election – an Inspiration for Afghan Youth

Youth play a tremendous role in United States (US) in different fields of life. Politics, that did not attract them much, is now experiencing a great participation of youngsters. And, the ongoing election is a witness to that fact. Youth are participating with motivation in the election and the candidates are counting much on youth vote. Candidates, along with many other analysts, believe that the youth vote could even be the deciding factor.

Participation of youth in the US presidential elections experienced a declining trend till 2008, but in 2008 election young voters, in fact, helped much in electing President Barack Obama for the White House and also played a role in keeping him there in 2012. According to estimations, Obama received around 65 percent of the youth vote (voters from 18 to 29 years old – in 2008, and around 60 percent in 2012). These voters made up about a fifth of voting-eligible citizens and around 50 percent of youth vote.

In the ongoing elections all the candidates from both the parties have strived to gain youth votes as they realize the importance of the youngsters in the modern age. Therefore, they have worked closely in their region to attract millennials and they have valued their inputs, efforts and support at the polls. They believe that the youngsters intend to make a difference and realize the importance of fiscal responsibility and a better government for the future in US. They seem to understand that youngster play a key role in modern technological developments and particularly in social media. And, these are the tools that can be usefully utilized by the candidates for their campaigns.

Youth in the US have now realized that they can be a part of change in the society if they participate actively in the elections. They experienced it while choosing Obama and now currently they seem to be voting for the candidates that stand for more radical changes both in Democrats and Republicans. As youth are more energetic and emotional, they want real changes to be seen in their lives. It has been observed that they are mostly concerned about the health and education policies and they are more inclined to vote for those candidates who have better policies for education and health. Whoever and however they vote, the most important factor is that they are participating in the democratic process and letting the people hear their voices. In fact, the overall participation of youth is appreciable and will ultimately turn into greater importance in the second part of the election.

The growing participation of youth in election process in the US provides a guiding example for many other countries as well. The youth in other countries, particularly the ones that have weaker democracies, can also take initiatives and play decisive role in the election process in their countries. The youth in Afghanistan can learn much from the youth in the US to come to the front and be counted in the democratic process that is very fragile and requires tremendous participation of the youth.

As youth have energy and enthusiasm and Afghan youth have proved in different ways that they have such energy; therefore, they can support Afghan democracy in its evolution. They proved in the last presidential election in the country that they, in the face of so many issues, have the courage to defend a democratic process, therefore, many of them casted their votes. However, there is more to be done.

A real change within Afghan political setup is possible only when the younger generation participate actively in politics. Afghanistan's political system is still being dominated by old players; resultantly, the new ideas are very rare to find. Most of these politicians even do not believe in a political setup and do not believe in empowering the people in true sense. Hence, relying on them would never guarantee marked changes in the future. So without participation of youth in the system and particularly in the election process would deprive the country of better socio-political changes.

Afghan youth, keeping the example of the youth in the US, should understand that they have to change their destinies themselves. They need to realize that they are more educated than the earlier generations; therefore, they have more responsibilities to shoulder. They have had the opportunities of having access to modern education and technology and they have to use that opportunity for the betterment of themselves and the society as whole.

They have the right to censure the politicians and their policies but they have that right only after they make efforts to change the status quo. If they themselves do not participate in politics and elections, they would not be in any position to have their say and let their voices be heard and thus they will also lose the right to criticize others, as others will ultimately pursue their own objectives and interests.



Safeguarding the Constitution!

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

A study by Afghanistan's Freedom House has found that the Afghan constitution has been persistently violated by all the three main branches of the state during past over a decade. According to the study, there have occurred more than 92 instances of violation of the constitution in recent years with the executive body particularly the presidential palace responsible for most of the violations. Afghanistan's Freedom House says the violations occurring over past 13 years span 161 of the total 162 articles of the country's constitution. Reacting to the report, a presidential spokesman has said that most of the violations relate to the former administrations, insisting that the government is responsible for implementation of the constitution and that the President is committed to safeguard the constitution. The study is coming as specifically piercing for the government as the highest executive entity in the country that has long been accused of negligence towards preserving and implementation of the constitution.

The study reveals the extent of the violation of laws by the government and members of the country's parliament and judiciary and outlines major instances of violations of the constitution committed by the main state bodies since it was established thirteen years ago. What is particularly glaring in the report is that most of the violations of the law is attributed to Afghanistan's former and current governments particularly the country's successive presidents. Instances such as failing to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in time, instating officials as acting ministers beyond the period set in the law and refusing to sign into laws the bills passed by the parliament are named as notable cases of violation of the constitution by the former and serving presidents of Afghanistan. The study has criticized the government for deliberately blocking enactment or implementation of laws passed or in the process of being enacted in the parliament. The report also blames the parliament and the judiciary for repeatedly violating the constitution by acting beyond their legal mandates.

The study echoes calls on the government to do more to safeguard the constitution and promote rule of law in the country. The government has been under criticisms from observes and independent entities for being the first to violate the existing laws and lacking the resolve to prevent day-to-day violation of laws by government officials, warlords, local strongmen and irresponsible groups. The study highlights the extent of violation of the country's constitution while culture of violating laws has become deeply rooted in the Afghan politics. The problem is deeply cultivated in the Afghan society, and the government's lack of resolve only compounds the problem. There is a broad sense of impunity from legal prosecution from among high-ranking officials to the lower officials in the public and government offices. Officials and public representatives goes corrupt and violate laws with complete sense of immunity from legal action and have the assumption that no one would come after them.

Lack of resolve to respect and protect the laws and the prevalent culture of impunity existing in the country has left the government unable to promote and extend rule of law. The government's failure to pursue perpetrators of human rights violations and bring them to justice has long been criticized. Recently the global rights advocacy group Human Rights Watch asked the Afghan government to end the culture of impunity that remains prevalent in the country and let the perpetrators of human rights violations unpunished. However, little has been done by the government to ensure the laws are enforced and those who violate human rights violations are pursued and punished.

The problem of violating laws is a chronic challenge in the country. Afghan political elite is rarely committed to principals of rule of law, good governance and transparency. Corruption and power struggle through undemocratic means are norms and is the dominant political culture in Afghanistan. The national unity government came to power with the promise to promote rule of law and end phenomena such as corruption, lack of accountability, impunity and violation of laws. However, it stucked in a cycle of inefficient administration and power struggle going through day to day violation of laws. The government is continuing to administer many affairs in contrary to the terms of laws. The internal problems have left the national unity government unable to prevent and resolve administrative and legal stalemates over the appointments of government officials and activities of key executive and independent bodies.

The government needs to realize its responsibility in promoting good governance, rule of law, accountability and transparency. These are made through years and decades of commitment by the government and the political elite. Afghanistan has long suffered chaos and anarchism. It is time for the government to take immediate actions indicating its own commitment to the laws and boosting enforcement of law in the country. In order to begin, the government needs to remain committed to enforce the laws particularly constitution including by highest officials in the government. There have been lots of efforts to strengthen law enforcement agencies. However, when the political elite refuses to safeguard the constitution, the state-building efforts and the measures to promote rule of law would go nowhere.

The report published by Afghanistan's Freedom House and other reports putting Afghanistan in the bottom in some key global rankings should come as wake-up calls for the Afghan government and the elite political class in the country. The Afghan government needs to take concrete measures to prove it is committed to safeguard the constitution and ensure that the laws are enforced by not only the public but also the state bodies and the political elite. The leaders of the national unity government must heed to the calls for safeguarding the constitution. They should take specific actions to deal with the current cases of violations of the constitution and ensure the mother law would be fully enforced in the future.

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Seeking Peace in the Midst of Violence?

By Hujjatullah

The Taliban insurgents have intensified their attacks after refusing the peace talks and an increase in civilian casualties continues unabated. The fatal attack in Kabul a week after the Taliban declared their Operation Omari which killed and wounded hundreds of people shows a spike in violence and terror across the country. The political instability filled the air with a sense of chagrin and led to economic stagnation and mass exodus. Finding their life and liberty at stake, a large number of Afghan youth are taking refuge to Europe so as to survive the challenges – which imperils the sovereignty of the government.

Reports about civilians' death toll make one more disappointed than ever before. To the Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, the terrorist attacks carried out by warring parties, mainly the Taliban and the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), continue posing threat to their life and curtail their freedom to a great extent. Needless to say, resuming peace talks was the only gleam of hope for Afghan nation and people waited patiently for a fruitful result. However, the Taliban's frequent refusal, setting hard preconditions, and intensifying their attacks left no room for peace and spread hatred and anger among the public, especially when the innocent people were the scapegoat of terror for a thousand and one times.

Despite all the said facts, UN secretary general's special representative for Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom said that the quadrilateral talks had not failed and there was no option with the warring parties except peace in Afghanistan. According to him, efforts at reviving the stalled peace by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States did not meet failure and considered peace negotiation a solution to the current security crisis.

However, it is believed that peace talks will be no more than a political game, with expert players behind the scene, seeking to continue the game as long as possible and keep the government's attention on it – no matter how fruitless it will be. Since the significance of peace talks has been magnified for many years, the questions arise in one's mind is that why the talks never come to fruition? Who are the whistle-blowers? Why the public does not see a single step progress in peace talks after years of the government's tireless struggles? Why violence and bloodshed have increased rather than being decreased recently? These questions are to be answered clearly and blank persistence on peace talks will not convince the public.

Although peace talks were a hot debate last year, our nation left a deadly year behind and the Taliban fighters captured large geographi-

cal parts in the country and inflicted heavy casualties upon our nation. As a result, in September 2015, the Taliban overran Kunduz, their first takeover of a major city since their fall from power in 2001. The Taliban also made gains in the south of the country in recent months, particularly in Helmand Province, where they control or pose a threat in majority of the 14 districts. In a nutshell, last year, the first since NATO ended combat operations, civilian casualties hit a record 11,002, with 3,545 deaths and 7,457 injuries. It was estimated that 60 percent of casualties were caused by anti-government forces including the Taliban and other groups such as Islamic State. Pro-government forces caused 19 percent of the total, but that was 70 percent higher than a year earlier. The rest could not be attributed directly. Over-all, 161 children were reportedly killed from January to March and 449 were wounded, a 29 percent rise over the first three months of 2015. In the period, civilian fatality reached 1,943, including 600 deaths and 1,343 injuries. The death rate was down 13 percent from the first quarter of 2105; however, the number of injuries was 11 percent higher.

Children were almost one-third of the nearly 2,000 civilian casualties caused by the Afghan conflict in the first three months of 2016 and there was a five percent rise in women being killed or wounded, which reflects an increase in fighting in built-up areas as the Taliban intensified its insurgency.

Daniel Bell, UNAMA human rights director, said, "If the fighting persists near schools, playgrounds, homes and clinics, and parties continue to use explosive weapons in those areas – particularly mortars and IED tactics, these appalling numbers of children killed and maimed will continue."

At a time of raging violence, which also took the lives of nearly 6,000 members of the Afghan security forces last year, the top security ministries have been run by acting heads, who do not have parliamentary approval.

Considering these issues, I can claim with full confidence that peace talks have failed and it will no longer come to fruition. One cannot trust peace talks while suffering violence and bloodshed. One-sided optimism seems a self-deception as the other side wages strong attacks and refuses to hold talks. Boycotting talks by Afghan government following the Kabul's deadly attack was a right decision as President Ashraf Ghani said that the Afghan government would never make peace with regional and international terrorists. It is simply said, "If you want peace, you must prepare for war." So, peace comes through reinforcing the army and strengthening defensive and offensive mechanism.

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