

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

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## Security Concerns and Challenges

This year the security concerns have grown very serious. There are reports of fighting in different parts of the country and Taliban insurgents have intensified their attacks in the capital Kabul, as well. Though the fighting gets worse during every spring season in the country as Taliban insurgents announce their Spring Offensive, this season it will really test Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the National Unity Government (NUG). Since the security responsibilities have been transitioned and most of international forces have left the country, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are leading the security responsibilities and would require to perform extremely well so as to face the challenges. In the same way, NUG has to prove that it has the capacity and is prepared to face the security challenges. So far, it has been lethargic in doing so as it has not yet formed the cabinet and the Defense Minister and the Chief of Army Staff are yet to be appointed.

Last week, President Ashraf Ghani announced Masoom Stanekzai as the nominee for Defense Minister, but it would take a while before he takes his position and starts performing his responsibilities. However, it must not go unmentioned that there is a crying need of a leader who can lead the Ministry as there has to be comprehensive operation launched against the insurgents so as to challenge their offensive approach, otherwise, they would seriously threaten the security situation and many innocent lives would be taken in the process. In the same way, Afghan army also requires a leader to guide it at this crucial juncture.

As President Ashraf Ghani, himself, said recently, "The nature of terrorism's has changed. We face terrorism that has entered in a more lethal and systematic framework with having access to more resources. Without a general understanding of the menace, it's difficult to overcome," therefore, it is imperative that NUG and ANSF must prepare themselves accordingly and let the insurgents know that they are fully prepared to protect their country and their people.

Few days earlier, Taliban insurgents ruthlessly attacked a hotel in Kabul where they killed 9 foreigners and then a few days later they carried out attacks outside Kabul International Airport and then Ministry of Justice, which resulted in the death of about 10 people. Insurgents have intensified their attacks so as to pressurize the government and compel it to collapse; however, President Ghani has recently mentioned, "I want to have a clear message for everybody. They should never think of collapse of Afghan government." But, it is important that he must have a clear and practical strategy to deal with the insurgents; verbal insistence alone would not solve the issue.

To deal with the security challenges and to establish lasting peace in the country, President Ashraf Ghani has strived to form ties with Pakistan anew. He has accepted that without the involvement of Pakistan, it is really difficult to convene peace talks with Taliban. In this regard, he has paid visit to Pakistan and Pakistani political and military leaderships have paid few visits to Kabul. Pakistan has also assured to facilitate the talks with Taliban and recently the signing of MoU between the intelligence agencies of the both the countries regarding joint efforts to deal with terrorism has proved to be a large stride. This, however, has given rise to some controversies as well, as most of Afghan parliamentarians and political leaders do not have a good opinion regarding the role of Pakistan intelligence agency, ISI, in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it has yet to be seen what fruit this deal would produce.

The most important factor at the moment is that Pakistan must pursue its commitments with true intentions. It has to understand that without combating the terrorism jointly it is impossible to defeat it in both the countries as they share a lengthy and porous border. In words of President Ghani, "We are seeking a lasting peace; peace between Afghanistan and Pakistan and peace among the Afghan government and armed opponents. There is an unexpected hostility between us, an issue which our friends in Pakistan have also accepted, but in reaching to a prosperous future, we need new efforts and joint cooperation, because militancy threatens Afghanistan, Pakistan and the whole region." It is also important that both the countries must leave behind the past and renew their efforts in this regard, as President Ghani says, "In order to reach to our future goals, we have to overcome the past. But going forward requires a movement and joint cooperation against the threats."

There is no doubt in the fact that terrorism is now a regional problem and all the countries in the region must support Afghanistan as it has been suffering the most from its loathsome consequences, but the Afghan government must, itself, make others believe in it and depict that it has a particular strategy and an iron will to combat it. Finding Afghan government committed and prepared, other countries would readily support it.



## Element that Strengthens Democracy!

By Asmatyari

The free exercise of right to choose a legislative of one's choice is one of the core value enshrined in modern democracy. It is free and fair system of election that paves the way of credible individuals to constitutional avenues to decide the fate of masses. The plot staged to rig a part or the whole of electoral system is indicative of hollowness of the system must be replaced by some fairer means. It is earnestly demanded the government should go with electoral reforms. We should mind it that the electoral reforms alone can not do away with corruption at human level instead institutions of high integrity must be built that could place a check on the loophole in the system itself.

In the last several elections held for presidency, parliament and provincial councils over the past decade, we have learned about range of structural flaws, logistical limitations and demographic changes which need to be updated and improved. Our infant democracy has to be institutionalized. Factually stating, it will take years to achieve all requirements of an improved electoral process, beginning with formation of independent democratic institutions ensuring fair transition. The international community riddled with other issues and priorities in Afghanistan should not ignore institutionalization and strengthening the foundations of a democratic system. What we need at present is radical reforms, and electoral apparatus standing fundamental to start with.

The reforms should also involve key elements, such as ensuring the independence of Afghan electoral bodies as well as transparency in how they conduct their work, promoting an electoral legal framework that supports effective participation by political and civic groups, and developing an accurate voter registry. This review could help reduce tensions among political entities, reinforce the legitimacy of Afghan governing institutions and guarantee that the will of the Afghan people is respected in future elections.

Despite the fact that electoral reform was a key component of the agreement that brought President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah together to form the national unity government, no action has yet been taken on reforming the country's electoral system. Whether the delayed execution of aforesaid undertaking labeled as confusion or measure of evolving consensus, does not serve the interest of country. The reform commission was expected to be formed after the government's cabinet was put in place. Subsequent to reinstatement of cabinet it is expected the reform commission to be substituted as a top working priority of NUG. It is rumored the Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) will be formed imminently; given the government representative have had a sitting with civil society institutions to lay down the principles that facilitate working mechanism of ERC. At present a lot of confusions are traced relative to credibility of status of Independent Election Commission (IEC) following formation of ERC. Will the two commissions perform independently or one will subdue the other? Who will govern whom in administrative affairs, are queries awaiting their fate subsequent to ERC begin to operate? The parliamentary election is procrastinated on the account of reforms not being introduced by the

government. Pressure is mounting on the national unity government since to install electoral reform before the upcoming parliamentary elections. Responding at the growing pressure president Ghani earlier had announced the establishment of the electoral reform commission last month after calls for the administration to honor its promise for reform grew from inside and outside the government. The president's decree mandated that recommendations be presented by the commission within two months. The short timeline was made so that changes could be brought to the national election law in enough time to hold the parliamentary and district council elections originally scheduled to take place over the summer. Nevertheless, the move foiled in the wake of differences going far and wide between the president and CEO on the name of candidate filling the key slot.

Finding the war torn Afghanistan entangled amidst multifold problems, the transparent system is termed, a turning point in the history of carrying enormous riches and uncertainties alike -the political elite must realize the sensitivity of the issue put aside their differences and decide something better deeming the interest of ordinary Afghan layman. It must be imbibed, the politicians tending to be leaders are left to drag the country out of multiple crises at the end of day instead of dragging back into stocks of crisis.

Following the former presidential election amidst the allegation of fraudulence, president Ghani and CEO Abdullah promised installing reforms in electoral systems in the bid to do away with widespread claims of frauds. The upcoming parliamentary and local council election can not be conducted seeking the support of election officials charged with allegation of fraudulence. According to election commission sources there are handsome number of officials found of supportive of registered frauds in the electoral process. The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) reported of investigations into 15,000 temporary employees and 20 permanent employees of the IEC. Seeing notorious condition of IEC the conduction of parliamentary election might not serve the interest of masses devoid of loss of time and resources. Both the local and international observers deem inconvenient to hold election without getting the electoral law reformed. A couple of weeks ago, the European Union's (EU) top representative in Afghanistan also warned against holding the elections without enacting reform within the IEC.

It is significantly important the ERC be chaired by a person of high integrity, whose tale of devotion, selflessness and office bearing has gone unquestioned. The person can be either be opted by mutual consensus between president, CEO and other political elites or raised to the position through due means and procedure.

It should be learnt that a credible and universally acceptable election will be held only when the government succeeds in installing agreeable reforms -the election will strengthen democracy in Afghanistan otherwise it emboldens the antagonistic forces. Any suspicion of ill-deed not only erodes the credibility of election, but also harms legality of the elections -consequently putting Afghanistan on avenues of crisis engulfing the entire system.

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## Turkey, As I Saw It!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

For years in the last decade or more, Turkey earned a lot of popularity for its progress. For the first time in its history, it was able to get rid of the ominous presence of a strong and secular military power that had great influence in the running of the country and the fate of democracy in the state was decided by the top brass of military and not by the democratic organs. With the emergence of AK Party into power in 2000 and the brisk development of the economy of the country made sure that military should mind its work of securing borders and not interfere in the matters of state. AK Party was and still is a strong entity in country's politics as rest of the parties have failed to organize on such a strong and expanded basis. Recently conducted polls show that AK Party is a strong contender to win the upcoming parliamentary elections as well.

On the other hand, Turkey's economy improved briskly and now Turkey is included in the top ten economies of the world. This economy edge also earned a lot of importance to Turkey in international politics. Spanning from the problem of Palestine, to Middle East and war-torn countries of Syria, Iraq and Libya, South Asia and Afghanistan to economic ties with South Korea, Japan and China and the economic crisis of Europe and America, voice of turkey carries a weight and importance of its own. Its two times Prime Minister and present day President Recep Tayyip Erdogan earned fame for his bold opinion about a number of international issues; most important one was the Palestine problem. Because of his bold stance to support Palestinians and talking against Israel's atrocities against Palestinians, his fame travelled rapidly from one to the other corner of Islamic world.

With all these realities in mind, I had the opportunity to pay a visit to turkey and witness all these with my own eyes. I found turkey even better than my expectations. I saw a wide network of roads, the metro services, large numbers of flights heading to destinations inside and outside the country and large number of economic and infrastructural activities that indicate that the economy of the country is yet to expand. At the Istanbul airport, I saw big lines of foreigners entering the country for tourism and business purposes. At the same time, thousands of Turkish citizens were also entering or leaving the country as now they have businesses or jobs in almost every part of the world. Country's tourism is on sharp rise and hundreds and millions of tourists visit different parts of the country, which is also the major source of foreign earnings for the country. At the same time, it is the favorite destination of hundreds and thousands of rich people from war-torn countries of Afghanistan, Arab countries and other parts of the world who have bought houses there and are living on long-term stay permits.

Just like any other country, there may be many different reasons for the jaw-widening progress of the country. However, I think there are two reasons working for this. First was the change of Turkish nation as a whole in which every person contributed the share in the growth of the country and the economy. This was possible due to the following two reasons, rising rate of literacy and perception of responsibility by

the masses of Turkey. I visited to far-flung areas where we reached after drive of almost two hours. Up there in the mountains, covered with trees was a small but well-facilitated school. I saw a number of latest vans dedicated to transport the schoolchildren. I was informed that schoolchildren are provided with milk, a good and healthy meal, free transport and education and well-facilitated schools. Now, number of teachers with high qualifications and professional skills are increasing, adding to the overall quality of education. Similarly, I saw that people were sincere and honest in carrying out their duties and this quality is very necessary for the rise of a nation. No doubt, there would be some corruption in the lines of government employees and public sector but overall, the rate of transparency and sense of responsibility is high.

Another good thing is the presence of a stable government that should provide an environment for people to grow and prosper. In last two decades, democracy has gained strength day by day and now there is no fear of any interference from the military dictators. Right from the first day, the ruling party also prioritized local and foreign investments and provided them with all the facilities. It is the reason why, there is present a wave of economic activities and expansion in every corner of the country.

Turkish society is a very interesting and worth-admiring society. Here, secularism and religion go hand in hand. In a Turkish society, people from different backgrounds, religious beliefs, languages, color and race live together, with single aim of living a better life. It is a general view that some members of a family might be wearing headscarves while others would be in absolute Western dress. Two brothers might be having differing viewpoints about religion but still they respect each other's opinion. In a sense, it is a democracy that has penetrated into the lives of common people as well. However, we also witnessed some protests and criticism of the government, declaring its acts to be non-democratic. The answer was given nicely in a private sitting by the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, Numan Kurtulmus, "Some powers in the world are not happy of the progress of Turkey. Turkey is now emerging as the only Islamic country to challenge and withstand the powers of West. This situation is not acceptable for some of them and they are working hard to create frustration and destabilize the country. Our stance regarding Palestine and support of victimized Muslim countries is also not acceptable for some nations and they are working to reverse our progress. However, we are not afraid of them, and we trust our people. If they are not happy of it, they will show their opinion in the upcoming elections but I am sure that they do trust AK Party and we will again be able to come and serve the country." Regarding politics, it was a delightful sign to see that all the parties were confidently and freely carrying out their election campaigns. This is the true spirit of democracy and upcoming elections would decide the next leaders of the country. As expected, transparent elections are going to be the elixir for the body of the democracy in a country that is going through the crucial stage of its life.

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