

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



November 07, 2018

Parliamentary Election Observers' Report

The parliamentary election in Afghanistan took place on 20th and 21st October 2018, with serious security concerns as just before the election, the Kandahar attack took place that took the life of Kandahar police chief, Gen. Raziq, the most powerful figure in the province along with the provincial intelligence chief. The incident made the National Unity Government (NUG) and Independent Election Commission (IEC) postpone the election in Kandahar for a week. In addition to that attack, ten other attacks took place on different candidates and political rallies, some of them resulting in the death of many innocent lives. Even on the day of election, several attacks were carried out by Taliban militants as they had boycotted election and had already warned Afghans to stay away from election centers. Nevertheless, the election took place and now people wait for the results, but there are still many questions about the transparency of the overall process and its fruitful results.

Even before the parliamentary election were held, there were serious concerns about it. The digital registration of the voters could not take place as the idea of electronic ID cards could not be put to practice because of differences within NUG itself. Moreover, serious questions were raised about the independency of IEC as well, since its members and key position holders were frequently changed by President Ashraf Ghani. Moreover, the biometric system could not be implemented properly due to limitation of time. Even after the election day, various complaints were raised by people in different parts of the country. Even in capital Kabul it could be implemented with all its attributes and potentials. Some even questioned the determination of IEC to implement the system properly.

The election observers, about 11,400 in number, were deployed in 33 provinces by a group of civil society organizations including: Training Human Rights Association for Afghan Women (THRA), Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA), Election and Transparency Watch Organization of Afghanistan (ETWA), Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), Afghanistan Civil Society Forum-organization (ACSFo), and Afghanistan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR) to observe the candidates' campaign activities, and voting and counting processes on the election days also observed the following: lack of coordination and poor management in controlling the polling centers by IEC that caused late opening in many polling centers; problems caused by the voter lists including lack of the lists in a notable number of centers, sending lists to wrong polling stations, missing some of the names started with certain letters such as k, g, a and so on in the lists; the problems caused by biometric devices due to inadequate training and lack of familiarity of the Commission staff with the correct use of these devices, their failure and the lack of effective technical support to quickly resolve the issues; violation of the Election Law in the extension of election for the second day; misconduct and violation of electoral law and regulations by some representatives of parties and candidates such as electoral campaigns and forcing and bribing the voters to vote in their favor.

These concerns raised by elections observers are very serious, and there must be measures to control them so that better steps can be taken in future. If these concerns are not dealt with proper attention and determination, it is very difficult to expect that something will change in the presidential election that is even more important for the future stability of the political situation in the country.

The election observers, in their report on Monday, suggested that it is necessary for IEC to respect the law, regulations and procedures for making important decisions such as the extension of the election for the second day and considering the opinions of all stakeholders in such cases; pay attention to professional training of IEC staff and their fundamental role in voting process and preventing waste of time; establish an effective communication system between observers, monitors and IEC staff at different levels; learn from lessons of implementing voter lists and biometric in the future election and on-time announcement of the primary and final results.

Nevertheless, there are some imperative points that were neglected by the observers since their duties were limited to the election day. The need of the time is to properly pave the way for a biometric system, which requires issuing electronic ID cards to the people and change the electoral system so that the way to a truly democratic election could be followed. At the same time, there should be efforts to make IEC totally independent so that it is able to perform its responsibilities without the interference of the government and government authorities. At the same time, the people must also make sure that they raise their voices for their democratic rights and have a vigilant role throughout the process. They need to cast their votes based on the political and social services and roles of the candidates, not on their wealth and family connections.



Kazakhstan: Strategic Leadership and Shining Future

By: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Historically the Kazak region had been an area populated by nomadic tribes. In the 18th century, the Russia Empire made advances into the region, controlling the whole of Kazakhstan by the middle of the 19th century.

After the Russian revolution in 1917 and the creation of the Soviet Union, civil war erupted in the region with various attempts to bring the people in the region together. Finally in 1936, the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic was formed.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan adopted the constitutional law on the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan on December 16, 1991. Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence, four days after Russia. As a result, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was elected the first, and to date, the only President of Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan Economic Initiatives and lessons

Kazakhstan's economy has gone through stages of decline, stagnation, and high economic growth after independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. The period from 1990 to 1997 was the period of negative economic growth, or at best stagnation (in 1995-1997, economic growth was close to zero) as the economic arrangements in the former planned economy broke down while new ones took shape. It was only from 1998 that Kazakhstan entered the phase of strong and sustained growth. Over the period 1998-2004, the population living below the poverty line in Kazakhstan declined significantly from 39 percent in 1998, to about 20 percent in 2004.

Given this incidence of poverty, the reduction of poverty is still important policy goal for Kazakhstan, which could also affect achievement of many other development goals. Reduction or elimination of poverty is essential for greater equality in society and for providing a dignified life to all citizens. Poverty reduction can also help in the advancement of education (especially higher education), which can lead to a more skilled workforce. It is often argued that poverty reduction can also contribute to improvements in maternal health, child mortality, control of infectious diseases, greater gender equality, etc. through the spread of education. These contributions, however, may have little relevance in the case of Kazakhstan, which already has close to 95 percent secondary enrollment for both boys and girls of the corresponding age group.

Kazakhstan has gone through periods of negative, slow, and rapid economic growth and so provides an interesting case study of the role of economic growth in reducing poverty. It is useful to learn the role of various policies and events in promoting growth or reducing poverty in Kazakhstan as this deepens the understanding of the process and how it may work in other transition economies.

Kazakhstan as a successful role model for Foreign Diplomacy and Partnership

Kazakhstan's partnership with the global community has also been fundamental to the smooth operation of the Northern Distribution Network to supply the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. In 2015, Kazakhstan supported global efforts to counter terrorism and extremism by hosting in Astana the Regional

Conference on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) for Central and South Asia and participated in two CVE summits in Washington, D.C. and New York. At the U.N. General Assembly in 2015, President Nazarbayev urged world leaders to reinforce their anti-terrorism efforts and proposed establishing a UN-led world-wide network against terrorism.

Kazakhstan's contribution to stronger international dialogue, inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony

As a nation that has many ethnic groups and a multicultural identity, Kazakhstan has promoted its belief in the importance of inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, and inter-religious dialogue, understanding and non-discrimination. Since 2003, Kazakhstan has hosted the triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, initiated by President Nazarbayev. The 5th Congress in June 2015 brought together leaders and high representatives of more than ten religions, as well as the UN Secretary General, the King of Jordan and the President of Finland. Kazakhstan was the main initiator of the proclamation by the United Nations of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022), aimed at promoting solidarity among all the peoples of the world, equality, inclusiveness, as well as cultural diversity. In 2010, Kazakhstan chaired the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), becoming the first country from the CIS, Asia and the first predominantly Muslim country to do so. Under the motto of Four Ts - Trust, Tolerance, Transparency and Tradition - Kazakhstan was able to give a new impetus to the organization and to convene its first summit in 11 years in Astana, which reaffirmed the principles on which it is based, with particular emphasis on the vision of a common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community. During the chairmanship, Astana also hosted a high level conference on tolerance which provided a good basis for common work on promoting tolerance towards all in the OSCE participating states. In 2011-12 Kazakhstan headed the OIC and made significant efforts to creating better understanding between predominantly Muslim nations and the rest of the world, also helping to launch, among others, OIC Human Rights Commission. It was at Kazakhstan's initiative and during its chairmanship that the Organization of Islamic Conference changed its name to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to reflect its broader goals of promoting cooperation among its 57 member states. And it was due to Kazakhstan's initiative and during its chairmanship that the OIC decided to establish the Islamic Organization for Food Security.

Kazakhstan Invaluable Supports to Afghanistan

Kazakhstan has already provided various forms of assistance to the UN member states in the amount of more than \$100 million. Significant support has been given to Afghanistan, including the provision of 1,000 scholarships for Afghan students in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has also provided aid to Afghanistan in the form of food, education and financial assistance for infrastructure projects, intended for building schools, hospitals and the rebuilding of roads.

Syria and Arab World Realignment

By: Manish Rai

Syria has long been an important centre for pan-Arab ideas in modern times and has been considered as the heart of Arabism. Since the beginning of the Arab nationalist movement in the late 19th and early 20th century, Syria has hoisted the banner of Arab nationalism. But after the beginning of civil war in 2011 Syria got diplomatically isolated in the Arab world but dynamics are changing now in Syria's favour. Recently President Bashar al-Assad told a Kuwaiti newspaper that Syria had reached a "major understanding" with Arab states after years of hostility over the country's civil war. Assad reveals that Syria and several Arab nations are on the verge of resuming diplomatic relations. This is the first interview that President al Assad has given to a Gulf media since the beginning of the civil war. Many Arab countries are courting the Syrian government as now that the civil war is almost over. Arab states are rethinking their next steps to deal with the status quo in Syria, coming to the realization that they will have to cope with the presence of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad at least for the near future. Moreover, Damascus remains attentive to its changing regional environment and Syrian diplomacy is also eagerly searching for Arab allies. Let's have a look at some important Arab state's rapprochement towards Syria.

Jordan- The Hashemite kingdom shares a border of more than 385 kilometres with Syria and is one of few Arab states that refused to cut its diplomatic ties with Syria and allowed Syrian embassy to operate in Amman. Recently the Nasib border crossing between Jordan and Syria was also reopened which clearly indicates that Damascus and Amman are looking forward for more deeper engagement.

Qatar- Doha is under blockade and faces immense pressure from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and their allies. Relief comes in the form of supplies flown in from Iran a staunch ally of Syria. Moreover, Qatar is eager to improve relations with Russia another ally of Syria. Qatar has communicated to both Iran and Russia that they are willing to tolerate President Assad in Syria.

Saudi Arabia- The most significant indication of a possible shift in Saudi-Syrian policy was when Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman made a surprising statement to Time magazine that "Bashar is staying. Saudi Arabia for a quiet a while now is seeking to pull Assad into the Arab fold so that it can weaken his alliance with Iran.

Egypt- Egyptians seem to have come to the reluctant conclusion that ending the conflict is a more pressing need than replacing the Assad regime. They think the destabilizing impact of the war, particularly the rise of ISIS, is more of a concern than the continuation of Iran's long-established influence in Damascus. Hence Cairo looks more tolerant towards Syrian Government.

UAE- UAE Minister of State for Gulf Affairs Anwar Gargash in June this year said in a statement to prominent Middle East newspaper "The National" that he regretted Syria's suspension from the Arab League as it had shut off a major conduit for regional voices in pushing for peace talks and a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Earlier this year, Syria flagship airliner resumed flights to an airport in the emirate of Sharjah in a move that potentially indicated improving trade relations between the two states.

Oman- The sultanate is the only Gulf state to have hosted the Syrian envoy even during the civil war. Oman has unusually good relations with Syrian close ally Iran because of this Muscat have maintained amicable relations with Syrian government.

Kuwait- Kuwaitis has been following their traditional pattern of avoiding participation in external conflicts. Kuwait is also skittish about the Syrian conflict because it does not wish to unnecessarily antagonize its relatively well-assimilated Shia population.

It seems more or less now Arab world is willing to take Syrian into its fold. But Syria now to be fully integrated into Arab world and play a dominant role has to redefine its political approach in the region. President Assad has won the military war but he has to be victorious in another one that's to reconstruct Syria which can only be achieved by realigning with Arab world.

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