

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



November 15, 2016

MPs' Dismissal of the Ministers

As Afghanistan is going through a crucial period of its history, it is being tested in various ways. Currently, it is being tested regarding its internal political situation that seems to be facing serious challenges. First, the political environment was dominated by the differences between the offices of President and Chief Executive Officer and now there are clear indications of conflict between the executive and legislature, which seems to be dragging the political situation towards further uncertainty. Members of Parliament (MPs) do not see eye to eye with the executive regarding its performance and they have now decided to take serious actions against its members by dismissing them in the parliament.

The Wolesi Jirga on Monday dismissed another minister - the minister of higher education, Farida Momand, bringing the total to six ministers fired in three days. MPs had summoned the Urban Development Minister Sayed Sadat Mansoor Naderi, Higher Education Minister Farida Momand and Abdul Basir Anwar, the Minister of Justice to report back on their development budget spent for the year. The ministers did not, however, arrive. This did not hinder MPs who still voted in their absence. Both Naderi and Anwar survived the vote of confidence but Momand was dismissed.

Earlier on Sunday, MPs summoned the education minister, Asadullah Hanif Balkhi, the minister of transport and civil aviation, Mohammadullah Batash, and Finance Minister Eklil Hakimi. They also failed to appear before parliament - where they too were supposed to give a report back on how much of their development budgets they had spent. Education Minister and Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation were dismissed; however, Finance Minister Eklil Hakimi could survive.

While in Saturday's session three other ministers - The Minister of Public Works Mahmood Baligh; Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled Nasreen Oryakhil, and Salahuddin Rabbani, the minister of foreign affairs were dismissed after they failed to provide satisfactory reports on the spending of development budgets. Important is to note that nine other ministers are to appear before the Wolesi Jirga this week and it would be interesting to see what will be decided about their fate. If the Wolesi Jirga keeps on sacking the ministers, the number may reach to 10 or even more. And, what will be the reaction of the President and CEO ultimately? Will the decision of the parliament followed and there will be arrangements for the introduction of new ministers is important to see.

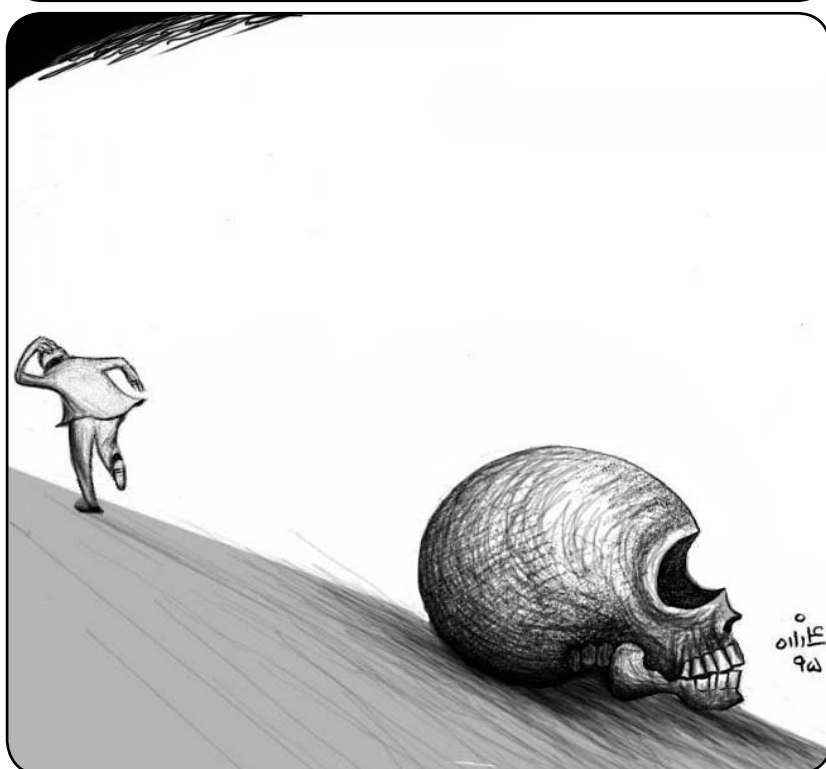
The Office of the Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah has already said that the ministers who failed to secure a vote of confidence would still continue their work. The Office has called for the interpretation of article 92 of the constitution, which defines the procedures for the impeachment of government ministers. A final decision on the fate of these ministers can be made once article 92 of the constitution has been interpreted, said Jawed Faisal, deputy spokesman for the CEO.

Interesting would be to see what the Wolesi Jirga says after this decision by the CEO office as earlier they had sacked ministers in this particular way and there was no requirement that the article 92 should be interpreted. Anyhow, this is a different situation as many ministers are being dismissed at the same time, which definitely has its costs.

Once the ministers are dismissed, there are influences on the tasks that their ministries are already performing. There will be a discontinuation of many tasks that will further influence the expenditure of the budget by the ministry. Moreover, finding replacement for the positions take time and by the time the replacements understand and start their responsibilities, there will already be a lag in activities and further pressure will develop that will influence the overall situation.

Nevertheless, it may also be argued that the ministers who are not able to perform their responsibilities properly and spend their budgets sufficiently, should be held accountable as it would be a strict message for the replacements. But, this particular positive aspect needs to be gauged in relation to the costs that have to be, ultimately, shouldered by the country and its poor people. There should be a cost-benefit analysis and special consideration should be given to the fact that the precious time and resources should not be wasted and political gains should be considered secondary to national interests.

Another important aspect of the situation can be studied in perspective of the fact that questions the legal status of the Wolesi Jirga after it has completed its tenure. And what would be the position of the President who had favored the continuation of the tenure of Wolesi Jirga till the parliamentary elections are held? Would he push for further urgency to arrange parliamentary elections or he would opt for negotiations with MPs to come to a temporary solution for the ongoing differences? He also has the option of accepting the votes of the House and finding the replacements by accepting the costs that are related to such a decision.



Parliament vs Government

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

In addition to numerous crises, Kabul is witnessing a new type of contrast between government and parliaments are forming. Within three days, the Afghan parliament has voted to dismiss six ministers including Farida Momand, the minister of higher education dismissed on Monday. This is an unprecedented move that underlined the fragility of National Unity government. All six were fired due to shortcomings in their performance and their failure to spend all allocated budgetary funds on time while the country is severely suffering from the worst condition. The dismissals are being in accordance with provisions in the Afghan constitution that give parliament the power to sack ministers if they fail to perform their job accordance with the law.

This happens at a time of fragility for the Afghan government and in spite of pleas from the president and chief executive to halt votes that threaten an already fragile Western-backed government. The President, Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah had also met with a delegation from parliament on Saturday night where they asked the members of parliament to delay their summons process. But the Parliament did not retreat its stance after the last week announcement that it would summon all ministers from Saturday over their failure to spend their development budgets.

Former rivals, president Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah have presided over an uneasy alliance that also includes the critic vice president General Rashid Dostum and has featured regular rows between the main leaders. Add to this the fact that the Taliban insurgency is threatening security across Afghanistan, and the move creates further pressure on national unity government, which has been mired in infighting ever since it was set up following the disputed election of 2014. Patched together with US backing after accusations of electoral fraud on both sides, the Kabul government was supposed to have overseen fresh parliamentary elections and a constitutional grand council to re-establish political legitimacy. But a two-year deadline has come and gone with none of the promised accomplished, leaving question marks over the future of the government at a time when political uncertainty is already being stoked by rising ethnic tensions.

The Afghan Presidential Palace "ARC" has criticized the dismissal of the ministers and said that the summons process should delay for the good of country and also until the ministers provide the necessary information on the expenditure of the development budget. President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah emphasize MPs that their decision will deal a huge political blow to the government at this critical time and urged them to stop the process. But MPs think that the posts of ministers are more political positions rather than being operational. The ministries can be smoothly run by deputy ministers. So the law must be implemented against lawlessness and poor performance. The government must not interfere to legal jurisdiction

of legislature.

Because of deteriorating situation of country and high dissatisfactions with the performance of NUG, it seems that other ministers are due to face the similar confidence votes. Most of MPs persist that this is the right of parliament and they will use it and will not let the government politicize this process.

On the other hand, Development budget low-consumption has long been a major problem in the country. Many ministers of the previous government also could not spend more than 50% of their development budget. The key problem of the less budget utilization lies in its factors. One of these factors is the low capacity of the ministers and their teams; however, there are also other causes which should not be disregarded.

Afghan ministries and independent budgetary units have two types of development budget: discretionary and non-discretionary. Non-discretionary budget is one main factor of the failure of ministers to spend despite having the essential capacity and plans. Another major problem is the untimely provision of funds by the donors. Furthermore, another thing that added the problems thereof as of the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) is the National Procurement Commission (NPC). Although NPC was established to bring in transparency in public contracts, there is a lot of criticism about the nature of its work and decisions. It is said that delay in major public contracts by NPC is the major cause for the low-consumption of the development budget this year. During their impeachment, the minister also complained about government bureaucracy; however, they do not have the nerve to specifically name the National Procurement Commission.

The low development budget consumption doubtlessly hurts the country, especially in the current critical situation where the unemployment rate is record high. If the development budget is properly spent on development affairs, it can create a lot of jobs in addition to having other economic benefits. However, the problem of budget low-consumption may not be solved merely by disqualifying all the ministers at once.

They must have monitored all performance of government very strictly, both in terms of quality and quantity, before reaching the critical steps. Now that they have reached this step; they need to decide carefully and also proceed to reform the factors that hold back the process, one of which is the low capacity of ministers and lack of meritocracy culture in the recruitment process of ministries. Regardless of other problems, the dismissal of all ministers will further slow down government affairs because it is not expected that new individuals will be picked soon to replace the unseated ministers given the frictions between NUG leaders. But it never means that the indolent ministers should not be woken up; they must be taught a tough lesson so that no one may fall in sleep against law and important responsibilities.

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No Hope for Bombastic Talks

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Taliban insurgents continue militancy with the support of al-Qaeda-linked group. About 45,000 opposition fighters are estimated to be involved in Afghanistan's protracted war and between 20 and 25 percent are foreigners. Following the downfall of their regime, the Taliban ragtag militias were reorganized and resumed their attack in Afghanistan. Within the two past years, the insurgency and civilian casualties have been heightened.

With the unmitigated militancy, the peace negotiation makes hot discussions in the media. A conference about Afghan peace process will, reportedly, be held in Islamabad by Pughwash - which has previously orchestrated constructive negotiation on the Afghan peace drive in France, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Afghan and Pakistani figures would participate in the dialogue to facilitate talks with warring factions.

In the meantime, however, Afghan Taliban refused holding talks with the National Unity Government (NUG). In October, three envoys of Taliban's political office arrived in Pakistan to "discuss arrests of key members" and other issues as it leaked to the media that the Taliban and Afghanistan held secret talks in Qatar. Subsequently, there seems no tendency towards peace.

On the contrary, the Taliban's splinter group, under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Rasool, previously declared that they would hold talk if the withdrawal of US forces from the country was guaranteed. "The group is ready to hold an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned talk," the splinter's group Mullah Manan Niazi is cited as saying. The group's readiness for talks was also announced earlier by HIA's leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The recent refusal of the Taliban comes as the Ministry of Defense (MoD) said earlier that the elimination of the Taliban fighters would not take more than a month but the regional intelligence were fueling the Afghan war by supporting the anti-government armed militants. Afghan officials say the leadership group of the Taliban and other militant groups including the Haqqani terrorist network are based in Pakistan, where they orchestrate attacks against Afghan government. Addressing a press conference, MoD spokesman Gen. Dawlat Waziri said that Afghan forces confiscated 430 Pakistani weapons including pistols and 23,800 rounds of ammunition in Badghis province. He condemned deadly clash in Kunduz on Thursday that left around 30 civilians dead and claimed that the Taliban continue to use the civilians as human shield and the fighters, including their leaders, are reckless regarding their own family members too.

An effort began in December last year, which resulted in forming the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), consisted of

Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, for bringing peace in Afghanistan, but that was also proved abortive following the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour. The incident resulted in mistrust among members of the QCG and reduced their hopes for seeking talks genuinely.

In resuming talks, the Taliban are believed to insist on their previous preconditions. Taliban declared their preconditions in Doha on January 23, which include complete withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, official recognition of Taliban's political office in Qatar, removal of Taliban from United Nations terrorist blacklist, halt to the arrest and elimination of Taliban and release of the Taliban inmates from prisons. It is also said that Taliban have asked for establishing interim government. Will Afghanistan accept the preconditions, which has no legal basis?

To bring the Taliban to peace table, Kabul and Islamabad need to bridge the gap and gain each other's trust. Pakistani authorities constantly denied harboring the Taliban and persisted on resuming the "reconciliation process". Moreover, the Pakistan army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif offered, last month, Afghanistan stout support for combating the menace of terrorism, saying peace in the neighboring country is vital to regional stability. He added that the route to a peaceful and prosperous region ran through a stable Afghanistan, "which is achievable through a coordinated approach".

It is an unmistakable fact that the "war on terror" did not give the desired result in Afghanistan and the insurgency has mounted recently despite years of counterterrorism campaigns. The US did not only spend millions of dollars but a large number of their soldiers lost their lives to eradicate violence and terror from the country. In another item, wars have been fought and took heavy tolls of Afghan soldiers and international troops, wrecked havoc on the country's financial resources, forced great number of people out of country, razed schools to the ground, curtailed the freedom of the public and violated their rights and dignity, however, insurgency remains a serious challenge.

In September 2014, Afghanistan signed a bilateral security agreement with the US that allows 10,000 US troops to remain in the country. The agreement is open-ended, stating that the troops may remain "until the end of 2024 and beyond", and that it can be terminated by either side with two years' notice. BSA was one of the highly controversial issues which put the nation and state in collision course as the public insisted on signing the contract and hoped for peace and security. However, Afghans dream did not come true for a peaceful country after the security agreement. Now, the peace talks draw mixed feelings from the public and there are no real interest and hope for it.

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