

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

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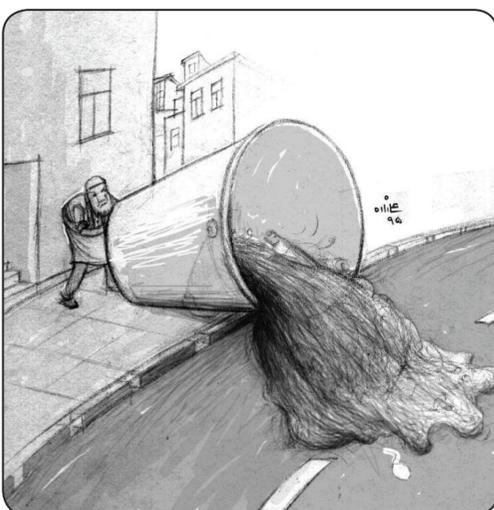
Electoral Malpractices: Implications on Democratic Consolidation in Afghanistan

It means one thing to conduct an election and make a transition to democracy or even conduct regular elections for years after transition. It also means another thing to have credible election that is generally accepted as free and fair by citizens and international community. Acceptability of election results by stakeholders would therefore increase the chances of consolidation of democracy.

Since democratic consolidation is an embodiment of longevity of a civilian regime as well as recognition and respect of democratic institutions, fairness, freest and credible elections must not therefore be an exception to these embodiments. The Wolesi Jirga elections held on 20 and 21 of October 2018, in Afghanistan, has been termed as a weak and miss managed election by most Afghan citizens. Political scholars argue that, if national elections are not held in a fair, free and transparent manner, they would have severe negative consequences for democracy. The implications of Electoral malpractices therefore manifest in issues such as disrespect and outright violations of electoral act with impunity due to weak democratic institutions, electoral violence, ethno-religious politics, rampant corruption and mismanagement, poverty and lack of internal democracy which is visible in incumbency factor in politics.

The moral foundation of the state in its capability to meet its obligation to the citizens, and citizen's ability to obey the laws of the state has been questioned. As instructively observed, these issues which have triggered electoral crises are mostly technical and logistical problems, however for many politicians, winning election is more important than deaths that occurs due to application of violence as part of their overall campaign strategy. For Afghanistan politicians it's either to gain an unfair advantage over their opponents, or to disrupt the process outright when it is clear that they are not of the winning side of the divide. This makes our democracy to remain nascent and unconsolidated thereby leading to minimal benefit emanating from it. It is therefore visible how democracy and not election is the problem in the Afghanistan System.

Elections play a vital in democratic consolidation in a country. Thus, the evidence reveals that the strict adherence to democratic values and ideals will bring about good democratic governance in the country. It shows the need for resuscitating the decaying democratic institutions, attitudes, resources and infrastructure at all levels of society as it affects electoral process for effective quest for democratic governance. Afghanistan needs to combat incumbency, violence, corruption and impunity so as to enhance the electoral process. As a result, unless the political leaders strictly adhere to the application of rule of law, constitutionalism and democratic values, the legitimacy of government and consolidation of democracy may not be sustained in our country.



The Cabinet Approved in Principle the Country's National Budget 2019

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Last Wednesday, on October 24, the Presidential palace (Arg), announced that they had approved the draft budget for the fiscal year 2019, after holding a cabinet meeting. According to the presidential press office, the budget was approved at the cabinet meeting under chairmanship of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. During the meeting, President Ghani praised the election of the Wolesi Jirga, which was successfully held in the center, and provinces of the country. The widespread participation of the people in this national process, the efforts of the candidates to mobilize the people for the vote and the sacrifice of national security forces were of the important of points of the national election, according to Mr. Ghani.

"Our prestigious people, with their broad participation in the election, proved that they believed in peace and freedom, they showed resistance against the threats, and accepted any victims for democracy and legitimacy" he added. In fact, the election success has been the outcome of the successful performance of the country's security and defense forces.

Then, according to the agenda, the acting minister of the Ministry of Finance presented the National Budget for Fiscal Year 2019, and after a comprehensive discussion, the Cabinet approved the budget in principle but for more specification they asked the Ministry of Finance to review the budget in consultation with the relevant ministers and heads of government departments. The cabinet meeting also mandated ministries and government departments to avoid buying luxury goods as considering the cost-saving principle.

The ceiling of national approved budget for fiscal year of 1398 is 399,417,934,931 (three hundred ninety nine billion and four hundred and seventeen million and nine hundred thirty four thousand and nine hundred thirty one) Afghani, including 275,223,837,836 (Two hundred seventy five billion two hundred twenty three million eight hundred thirty seven thousand eight hundred and thirty six) Afghani for ordinary budget and an amount of 124,194,097,095 (one hundred twenty four billion one hundred ninety four million ninety seven thousand ninety five) are allocated to the development budget, and an amount of 61,222,063,395 (sixty one billion two hundred and twenty two million and sixty three thousand three hundred ninety five) Afghani, as an optional developmental budget and an amount of 62,972,033,700 (sixty-two billion nine hundred seventy two million and thirty-three thousand seven hundred) Afghani are considered as non-optional development budget.

From the total amount for the fiscal year 1398, 188,005,594,664 (one hundred eighty eight billion five million, five hundred and ninety four thousand six hundred and sixty four), Afghani comes from domestic income and 199,015,897,364 (one hundred ninety nine billion and fifteen million eight

hundred and ninety seven thousand three hundred and sixty four) Afghani are funded from foreign sources. The Total income or financing from domestic and foreign sources is 387,021,492,028 (three hundred eighty seven billion and twenty one million and four hundred and ninety two thousand and twenty eighty) Afghani. The acting minister added that domestic revenues are improving and it is projected to increase by 7.7% in fiscal 1398 compared to fiscal year 1397.

In addition to the above, the acting minister of the Ministry of Finance mentioned the increase of 1,043,689,689 (one billion and forty three million, six thousand and nine thousand six hundred eighty-nine) Afghani to the cabinet meeting in the 1397 budget, adding that the increase was of Asia World Bank for developing projects of mines and petroleum ministries, finance, and the DAB. This was also endorsed by the Cabinet.

Then, the modifications to the national budget for fiscal year 1397 were presented by the finance acting minister. These adjustments include an increase in the optional development budget of 1397, Ministry of Public Health, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Energy and Water, Public health, and the Directorate General Office of Presidential Administration. There is also a lack of tidy development funds for office projects that are not expected to be consumed in the fiscal year 1397. These adjustments were approved by the cabinet.

Similarly, the proposal for the purchase of seed wheat with government subsidy and its sale to farmers was submitted to the meeting by the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock. He said that the Ministry of Agriculture plans to purchase 10,000 metric tons of wheat seed from active seed production companies in the country, and, through the agricultural departments of the provinces, will be available to farmers in the country. Therefore, in view of the lack of production companies and the different price of seed prices in the provinces, the price of 50 kilograms of wheat was determined at a meeting of the National Board of Seeds of the Ministry of Agriculture at a cost of 726 AFN

Overall, from the total of 399 billion Afghani national budget proposed, almost half of them will be paid for by Afghanistan's domestic revenue and out of the total budget nearly AFN124 billion outlay is allocated for development in various sectors including Information Technology, agriculture, transit routes, and power generation. Comparing the past, the national budget rose from 377 billion Afghani in previous year to 99 billion Afghani in the coming fiscal year. Thereafter, the adjustments to the national budget for fiscal year 1397/2018 were presented by the acting minister of Finance and the deputy Ministry of Finance was also approved by the cabinet.

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Xinjiang, A Land of Wonders

By: Liu Jinsong

China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is a very familiar place for Afghan friends. It shares border with Afghanistan, and it takes only three hours for Afghan friends fly from Kabul to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. The ancient Silk Road linked Chinese Xinjiang with Afghanistan closely.

Xinjiang is my hometown. I spent seventeen years there in my childhood, nurtured by both water from Mount Tianshan (the heavenly mountain) and care from teachers and elders of different ethnic groups. Naan and pilaf are my favorite food. I still remember that kids of different ethnic groups went to school and played together like members of a family. We visited each other frequently and all rushed to celebrate festivals of different ethnic origins for the abundant snacks and fruits on those occasions. Xinjiang is a land of treasure. There is a song depicting the beautiful and richly endowed autonomous region. "Our Xinjiang is a land of wonders. Beautiful pastures extend to the North and South of Mount Tianshan. Grasses bow in the breeze, revealing flocks and herds. We have grapes and melons sweet and fragrant, mineral deposits abundant."

In the 1970s when I grew up in Xinjiang, life was hard for my family and our neighbors. The four people in my family lived in a bungalow of only a dozen square metres with a leaking roof. I had to help my parents by joining various queues to buy everyday necessities with all kinds of ration coupons. With reform and opening up, Xinjiang has also achieved leapfrog economic growth and higher living standards like elsewhere in China, with people moving into bigger houses and enjoying an increasingly rich array of goods. Ration coupons have long become collectibles. Today in Xinjiang, most urban households have a private car. Per capita income reached nearly 8000 US dollars in 2017, a 128-fold increase over 40 years ago.

In Xinjiang, over 23 million people live on the land of 16 million square kilometres. Many of them are either Uygur, Han, Kazakh or Hui. Some other minority groups are also familiar for Afghans, such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Kirghiz (called the Khalkhas in China). People of different ethnic groups live together in harmony. We treat each other as equals, help each other in times of need, and jointly defend and develop the system of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities. Under this basic political system, people of all ethnic groups manage local affairs autonomously while safeguarding the principle of national unity. Chief administrative officers of all autonomous regions, prefectures and counties are all from the relevant ethnic groups. Now nearly 100,000 civil servants in Xinjiang are ethnic minorities.

Many of my friends in Xinjiang are devout Muslims. My home was actually very close to a mosque and I heard the calls to prayer every day. Compatriots of different ethnic groups respect each others' customs and religious beliefs. Both the Corban (Eid Al-Adha) and the Spring Festival are grand festivals and holidays celebrated by all locals. There is a large proportion of Muslim population and a high per capita share of religious facilities. The government respects and protects the freedom of religious belief and administers religious affairs according to law. Religious services facilities and normal religious activities are protected. The government even provides charter flight for pilgrims to perform the Hajj to Mecca every year.

On July 5th, 2009, the severe violent terrorist attacks in Urumqi shocked the whole China. Nearly 200 people died and more than 1700 were injured in the event. Violent terrorists slaughtered the innocent people in the Nanmen Square, where used to be a place for all people to rest and entertain themselves. For some time around the date, a series of crimes were committed by violent terrorists, who demonstrated extreme cruelty, showed no mercy even to women or children and violated the teachings of the religion that they had claimed ownership. The inhuman criminals trampled upon lives and challenged the rule of law, leaving the people in Xinjiang extremely upset and streets desolate for quite some time.

People of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang hate the violent terrorists bitterly. With the public opinion in mind, the government has taken resolute measures to crack down on the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism and restore long-term social stability, peace and order. In the past two years, with great significance attached to both crackdown and prevention, the government has on the one hand continued to strike hard on the few serious violent terrorist crimes and on the other taken measures to develop vocational and technical education and training to de-extremize the population concerned. Efforts are made to win over, help, educate and rectify people with minor offences and to influence and save those young people who were affected by messages in any form of violence or terrorism or by illegal preaching.

Vocational and technical education and training are provided according to law and designed to suit and serve the target groups. They have taken some people away from the slippery slope towards committing crimes and becoming victims of the "three evil forces" by enabling them to distinguish between truth and falsehood, raising their law awareness and citizen consciousness and empowering them with the standard national language ability and income-generating skills so as to support themselves in modern society.

The Chinese government respects and protects the basic human rights of all citizens. This is written in the Chinese Constitution. In Xinjiang, to contain extremism and crack down on violent terrorists represents the utmost need to protect the basic human rights of local citizens. The people support the comprehensive policies of the government wholeheartedly. As there has been no violent terrorist event in the past two years, people feel safe and relaxed and they may now sleep with a peaceful mind. Restaurants and cinemas may now open till late night. Last year, per capita income of Xinjiang residents increased by over 8%. In the first three quarters of this year, more than 130 million domestic and foreign tourists visited Xinjiang. Quite some Afghan friends recently went to the Grand Bazaar in Urumqi and the Kashgar Old Town. They visited the bustling night market and spoke well of the prosperity and peace. Such a situation has not come by easily.

Afghanistan and China's Xinjiang are joined by common mountains and rivers. Standing both along the Silk Road Economic Belt and at the forefront of international antiterror war, we are a community of shared future. When Afghanistan fares well, it is good for Xinjiang; and vice versa. Badakhshan Province and Xinjiang Autonomous Region have signed an agreement of intent to develop a friendly province/region relationship. Xinjiang provided much needed assistance to victims of drought in Badakhshan. In the past year, two Afghan leaders attended the China-Eurasia Expo in Urumqi, many groups of Afghan professionals accepted training in Xinjiang, a hundred Afghan children with congenital heart diseases had operations in Urumqi and were cured, and over 4000 Afghan friends visited Xinjiang. For ordinary Afghans, the autonomous region promised to be the roofs of your friends, neighbors and relatives and a reliable interchange station to Chinese inland, a reassuring school and a trustworthy place for business.

Last year His Excellency Second Vice President Sarwar Danish published an article titled "Lessons from the World's Second Economy" after visiting Xinjiang. He described the unity of different ethnic groups there as pomegranate seeds holding tightly to one another. In his opinion, the successful experience of Xinjiang shows that the people must work together with the government and seize the opportunity to open up and achieve development, that the private sector should also be patriotic while pursuing economic gains and that the soil for radical or violent organizations must be eliminated from the society. He encouraged people from all walks of life in Afghanistan to learn more from the Chinese culture, language and experience and in this regard quoted Prophet Mohammed: "Seek knowledge, even it's as far away as in China".

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