

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



September 21, 2016

Concerns Regarding Women Rights Persist

Concerns regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan persist and they are, in fact, threatening the overall development. Though it is not a new issue that women suffer from discrimination and injustice, the attention paid to solve the issue is really negligible. Particularly, after the downfall of Taliban, there were expectations that the country would make strides in bringing women to social and political lives but the hopes have remained only hopes. Though some developments were made, they are being sacrificed as the country is moving towards instability and war.

A statement by the Ministry of Finance on Tuesday revealed that women have largely been forgotten about in terms of development around gender-related programs. According to the ministry, a recent survey has found that development programs have focused on only one percent of women in the country. The Finance Ministry's financial deputy Mustafa Mastoor said in the statement, "The number that has not been focused on is not only a big (percentage of the) population but their voices have not been heard and this has resulted in big programs which have not (in turn) yielded good results over the past few years."

A study by Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) reveals that despite the fact that policies mention gender equality as an important issue, government's budget to practice these programs has been limited.

Meanwhile the Afghan Women Network (AWN) believes that women are not represented sufficiently in the government and, therefore, there should be more seats reserved for them in the future. Hasina Safi, AWN head, told a news conference in Kabul that they had prepared their suggestions for the upcoming Brussels Conference and they were aimed at encouraging the Afghan government to increase women's role in its administration. Safi also said the AWN wanted women's voice to be heard about their current situation and particularly their role to be considered in governance, law enforcement and the peace process.

Samira Hamidi, AWN board director, said, "Currently only four women are ministers, nine others are deputy ministers, four ambassadors and one woman is governor in the country. And, six percent of staff members of the attorney general's office, eight percent of the Supreme Court and one percent of the Ministry of Defense are women."

Afghan authorities need to make serious commitments about women as women in this country have not been empowered as much as they should be. Women in Afghanistan have been undergoing discriminatory behavior for decades now. The religious extremism and obsolete tribal values have been vehemently responsible for violation and violence against them. Even though, they have been echoing their concerns, they do not seem to get as much attention as possible in the patriarchal Afghan society. As a matter of fact, the male-chauvinistic ears are not ready to hear them though they feel their vibrations clearly. Nevertheless, the efforts in this regard must never be given up and they should continue in every possible way. One of the ways to rise up and be counted in the social and political life is to strive participating in the social and political institutions and processes. And, this is not the responsibility of a particular faction of society, not a particular stratum, not even a particular gender but of all those human beings have some concern and some love for human rights, the ones who believe in dignity of human beings and their existence without any differentiation of gender.

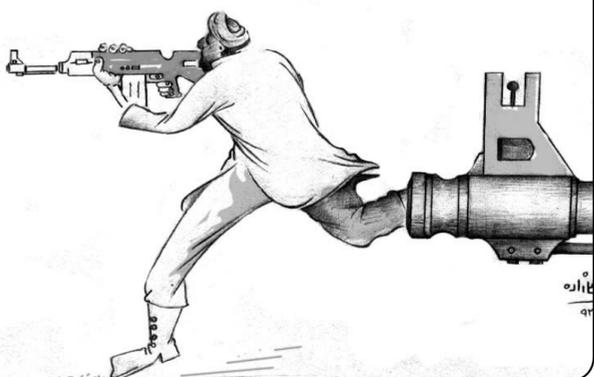
Particularly, men can play an imperative role. Though they have been mostly responsible for the discrimination, modern men can now change their attitude and commit themselves to make the difference. Fighting the discrimination and violence does not necessarily mean that women alone should shoulder the responsibility. There should be efforts to bring about changes in the attitude of men towards women; otherwise, fighting for the rights of women would be very difficult.

In similar fashion, the different institutions, functioning in the society must also fulfill their responsibilities and they must ensure that there should not be biased policies and attitude against the women. Their policies and practices must never be inclined towards discrimination and injustice on the basis of gender. Not only the women rights organization but different other social, political and administrative organizations can have a part in making sure that women are properly compensated within the system and are not neglected on the basis of prejudice.

In the countries like Afghanistan, the religious and tribal institutions can also play tremendous role in uplifting the position of women and giving them the status they deserve. As most of the people are religious and tribal, they can easily be motivated by such institutions for better and higher purposes.

It is important that the efforts regarding women rights do not end only in conferences and celebrations by certain organizations and individuals but in resolute commitments and most importantly practical efforts for the rights and position of women. The upcoming Brussels Summit must emphasize that this really happens.

War



The Final Steps of Peace Talks with HIA

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The peace agreement that is said to be in finalizing steps between government and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar the chief of Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) is not likely to bring significant changes in the fortunes of Afghanistan. As the HIA chief is the least of the several factors threatening social and economical development in Afghanistan. The main factors such as Taliban, Daesh, Haqqani group and etc remained determined to blackmailing the country. On the other hand, the government has not shown a strong determination against terrorists who used to be destroying social and economic infrastructures. Even so, the authorities are steeped in childish, internal and tribal issues.

Few days after striking a landmark peace deal with Kabul administration, the HIA chief Gulbuddin Hekmatyar invited Taliban insurgents to also become part of the reconciliation process. Hekmatyar, whose whereabouts have been unknown since 2001, is expected to surface after his group and the National Unity Government formally sign the agreement, paving the way for HIA to start political activities. "I appeals to all Afghans to resolve problems through an intra-Afghan dialogue. Hundreds of innocent Afghans are killed just because of fighting to capture security posts and districts. This is neither a logical way nor allowed in Islam. Armed groups involved in fighting should declare a temporary ceasefire and join the intra-Afghan dialogue," the HIA chief said in his Eid message. Hekmatyar confirmed that HIA and the government have reached a key agreement after nearly two years of continued and hectic negotiations. "Afghanistan is in dire need of peace and reconciliations and therefore I signed the peace accord with Afghan government," he said. He also called upon the Taliban and other armed groups to take part in talks and present their demands in line with Islamic 'Sharia'. "I assure the Taliban that HIA will support their genuine demands. I would ask the government to show sincerity towards the opponents. I would also demand the release of several important commanders of the Taliban. Also he ordered his fighters to spare Afghan security personnel and only act against them if provoked. "We are not in favour of fighting with Afghan security forces. We have instructed our Mujahideen to avoid attacks on Afghan forces, and respond only if they come under attack," he added in his Eid message. President Ashraf Ghani also confirmed that a peace agreement with the HIA would be finalized very soon. "We hope for peace in Afghanistan and to end the war in the country," he said.

"All should accept the reality that peace and security could only be ensured when foreign troops quit, foreign intervention in Afghanistan's internal affairs has ended, Afghans are allowed to solve problems on their own, decide a system and choose trusted leaders," Hekmatyar said. "We should agree that only the Afghan Muslim nation has the right to elect leadership and introduce a system, and to

stop the people from reaching the corridors of powers with the help of arms and money from abroad," he added. Referring to peace talks between HIA and the government, he urged Ghani not to miss the opportunity for bringing an end to the war and restoring peace. He also called upon President Obama "not to accept the suggestions of warmongers who insist on a longer stay of American troops and a continuation of the war."

However, the peace deal with the HIA which over the years has been losing its public support as well as its dedicated armed cadre can hardly be a significant consolation for the government. It is still not very clear who between the two had initiated the peace process. Both perhaps were equally willing because of their respective compulsions and responded to the other's initiative readily. One, however, suspects it was the initiative of Hekmatyar who at the end of his political career wanted perhaps to go down in a blaze of glory. But while the process once it leads to an agreement would certainly bring Gulbuddin out of his long-drawn isolation and in his opinion make his party once again relevant to the current developments in Afghanistan.

But it is questionable that the very man who had in the first place destroyed any prospects of a Mujahideen-led multi-faction government in Kabul after the collapse of the Soviet backed communist regime in 1992 by bombarding the Afghan capital with rockets seems flexible now. Again it is questionable, after having served as Prime Minister in Kabul from March 1993 till January 1994 but not satisfied with his share of power in the government he tried to overthrow Rabbani's Islamic government by force. His rocket attacks had almost completely destroyed Kabul. In late 1996, the Taliban overran Kabul and forced Rabbani and Hekmatyar to flee north. Since then, he has been out of the reckoning in the Afghan power play. It is said that senility has perhaps taken over his mental faculties because after having entered into to a peace process with the government of Ghani he is assuring Taliban that the HIA would support their genuine demands.

Moreover, it raised the concerns that HIA's ideologies will restrict the role of women in political and social arenas to a large extent and marginalize them from the government. So, if peace deal is signed at the cost of people's rights, legal values and freedom, this will not be acceptable for citizens who sacrificed to achieving current state. It is the government to be vigilant enough so that the negotiation does not be counterproductive or create a gap between state and nation since it seems to put the government on a collision course with the public. Finally, the Taliban's deceptive play in peace game should be an eye-opener for Afghan officials and further sacrifices in this regard will be beyond the tolerance of the nation.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the newly emerging writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammad-zahirakbari@gmail.com

Political Conflicts Will Aggravate the Challenges

By Hujjatullah Zia

Downplaying the precarious security situation and escalated militancy will deteriorate the status quo. The conflict in government's machinery and mistrust between the heads of National Unity Government (NUG) will aggravate the political crises and create further challenges. On one hand, the death toll, including soldiers and civilians, has reached its peak and the Taliban outfits have intensified their attacks, on the other hand, the officials redirect their efforts and energy into less significant issues - this will lead the country to a political quagmire.

Last month, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah criticized the president's unilateralism, raising issues such as appointments made and merits awarded without consulting him. He in particular blamed President Ghani for not making time to meet with him one-on-one to discuss "fundamental issues," leading into his most stinging comment that a person who "does not have the patience for a discussion, also is not fit for the presidency." He then defended his participation in the NUG and discussed the challenges facing the country and how they had, in his view, stopped the government from implementing the NUG agreement. He stressed the need for elections, electoral reform and a Loya Jirga that would decide on whether to turn his position into an executive prime ministerial position. Towards the end of his speech he said that, despite his patience and prudence, the time to be deceived by mere words was over.

In response to Abdullah's statement, Ghani said, "I too do not trust those who do not trust me because of their negative interests ... whenever I take action against corruption, part of a faction which has taken hundreds of millions raises its voice to say that the president monopolizes all power." His public reaction was followed by a terse palace statement that stressed the importance of unity and described Abdullah's remarks as not in line with "the norms and spirit of governance."

Afghan former President Hamed Karzai, in an interview with Radio Azadi, as usual, emphasized the need for a Loya Jirga and believed that if a Loya Jirga was not convened, it would cause problems for our country and increase discontent. According to him, the traditional Loya Jirga would not only approve and renew the legitimacy of the system but also found a way out of the challenges.

Subsequently, a meeting was held between CEO and President Ghani, in which Abdullah presented a list of demands that was immediately leaked to the media. His demands focused, first of all, on the full implementation of the political agreement, which included "purposeful and honest" participation and representation; joint decision making and effective cooperation; the delegation of duties to the post of executive prime

minister and non-interference in his affairs; full participation of the chief executive in the process of proposing and approving appointments on different levels and equitable participation in the appointments process of high ranking government officials; the establishment of a commission towards amending the Constitution; expediting the process of electoral reform; address the "time-wasting" that has prevented the start of the electronic ID card distribution; a timeline for the implementation of the political agreement.

The second meeting took place on August 25, 2016 was meant as an opportunity for the president to respond to Abdullah's demands, and to present his own stance, but instead the two men reportedly discussed confidence-building measures. The CEO's office released a statement describing the atmosphere as "cordial" and saying that "the president had expressed his views" and "both leaders agreed to discuss the effective conduct of affairs within the framework of the political agreement in joint meetings next week."

After the third meeting on August 28, 2016, the CEO's office released a statement saying the two leaders had reached agreements on the electoral system, the distribution of electronic ID cards, the establishment of a commission to amend the constitution and the appointment of new members to the committee to oversee the implementation of the political agreement.

On September 03, 2016, in a meeting with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, where they discussed the political developments, the electoral reform process and the meetings between the NUG leaders, Abdullah seemed to announce the end of the rift when he said, "we adhere to reforms, working together with a new spirit and joint commitment."

The conflicts between the heads of NUG will damage their fame and reputation among the nation and lead to public distrust. Afghans expect much from them and hope that they will resolve the political challenges and protect their rights and freedom rather than being involved in conflicts between themselves. Such conflicts will let the political opponents to fish in troubled waters and muddy the issue in their own interests. After all, the Taliban fighters will carry out their offensives more confidently as the nation witnessed deadly attacks in recent weeks.

To mitigate the insurgency and protect the nation's rights and freedom, the officials will have to settle their own conflicts and emphasize the spirit of unity and brotherhood for the public. They are to centralize their energy on the issue of terrorism and counter insurgency to gain the national support rather than creating a rift between state and nation. So, the NUG's heads have higher responsibilities regarding national issues, as they promised during their campaigns, and it is time to fulfill them.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.