

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



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Government Lacks Commitment to Solve Basic Issues

As Afghan government has not been able to deliver well, the concerns of the people and their skepticism about the future of the country seem to be on the rise. They have lost their confidence on the government and do not expect much from it. It has also given rise to a sense of indifference on the part of the people to do good for the society as a whole. Finding the responsible individuals doing nothing worthwhile, the poor and deprived people seem reluctant to do what they could possibly do on their own for improvements in the country. As a matter of fact, the leading individuals have not been able to set any exemplary guideline for others to follow. They have been involved in pursuing their own self-centered objectives. To support these claims, a survey conducted by Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) shows that majority of the people in Afghanistan are skeptical about National Unity Government's (NUG) policies on economy, security and corruption.

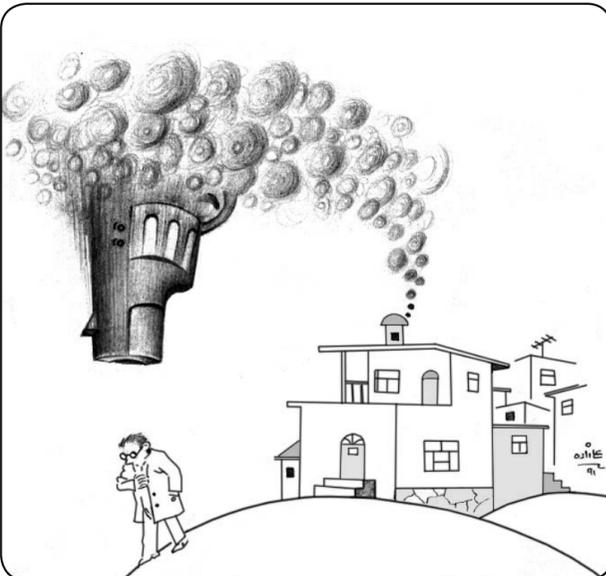
The poll shows that almost 90 percent of Afghans have said that they believe government is facing serious challenges. This skepticism and opinion that the people have developed regarding the performance of the government is not because of their political differences with the government; rather most of it has to do with the incapacity of the government to do something worthwhile in sectors like economy, security and corruption.

Since the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan and decrease in the international support for country's economic challenges, the government should have concentrated properly towards improving the country's economic system and making efforts to make Afghanistan self-sufficient, at least, in certain factors, but the government has not been able to do so. Even today, Afghanistan stands dependent on international support for most of its expenditures as the businesses have not been able to flourish as much as they should have; and the people are very well aware of all these facts. The polls show that 80 percent of respondents said that economic development in the country has deteriorated during the present government compared to the previous administration, while 89 percent of the respondents said government failed to create jobs for Afghans while 71 percent raised doubts over government's economic strategy.

As far as security is concerned, there is nothing hidden from the people as they are the ones who mostly suffer from the consequences of lingering and, in certain cases, increasing insecurity. They are the ones who die and get injured when the insurgents attack them directly or indirectly. Therefore, they do not seem satisfied with what is being done to control the growing insecurity in the country. On the basis of the poll, the majority of Afghans have become increasingly more skeptical about peace efforts. The report indicates that the High Peace Council (HPC) has failed to make a breakthrough in peace talks with insurgents and no tangible outcomes have been achieved. "The lack of harmony between members of the peace council is the main reason of their failure for peace," said CSRS member Ahmad Bilal Khalil. On security, 58 percent of respondents said that security is likely to further deteriorate in the country.

Same is the case with the efforts regarding corruption. NUG made some huge promises during its initial days and there were expectations that something would ultimately happen but the government took no time in forgetting those promises. And, it is the reason that corruption is still one of the main issues in Afghanistan and it is also hampering the progress in other sectors. For example, one of the reasons that the country has not been able to achieve something worthwhile in the field of security and economic development is corruption. And, the common people have to suffer the consequences to a great extent. The CSRS poll shows that distrust among Afghans continues over the government's anti-graft strategy. The report states that almost 70 percent of Afghans have said government is not firmly committed to fighting corruption in the country. It is really difficult to make any achievement in any sector as long as there is prevailing corruption there. Before making efforts to improve different sectors, the first step should be discouraging corruption in every possible manner; otherwise, nothing would be achieved.

NUG requires doing an immense amount of work if it wants to restore its image and its legitimacy. Providing services and the basic requirements to the people is the most important factor in enabling the government do so. If it does not have enough resources, at least, it can show through its willingness and resolve that is really serious in solving the problems of the people. As the CSRS polls say, "A lack of commitment within the government's political leadership, weakness of the legal and judicial institutions and influence of powerful elements within government institutions are among the main issues which have undermined efforts to address the challenges."



Parliament: Ups and Downs

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Parliament is widely recognized as the pivotal institution of democracy and everybody agrees on what the functions of a parliament are. Nobody doubts that they are to embody the will of people in government, and carries all their expectations that democracy will be truly responsive to their needs and help to solve the most pressing problems that confront them in their daily lives. As the elected body that represents society in all its diversity, parliaments have a unique responsibility for reconciling the conflicting interests and expectations of different groups and communities through the democratic means of dialogue and compromise. As the key legislative organ, parliaments have the task of adapting society's laws to its rapidly changing needs and circumstances. As the body entrusted with the oversight of government, they are responsible for ensuring that governments are fully accountable to the people. For parliaments to be truly representative, elections must be free and fair. Citizens must have access to information about parliamentary proceedings, legislation, and policy, and be able to engage in continual dialogue with parliamentarians. Over all, the effective parliaments shape policies and laws which respond to the needs of citizens, and support sustainable and equitable development.

However, there are no two parliaments the same in the world; they differ in form, role and functioning. They are shaped by the history and culture of each individual country. In Afghanistan, The Parliament consists of Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) and Mesharano Jirga (Upper House) with a guaranteed representation of women. Lower house is composed of 249 members where 10 seats are allocated for the elected representatives of the nomads who are elected for five years term. Afghanistan adopted Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system for its parliamentary elections. The 239 seats of lower house were divided among provinces by Joint Election Management Board (JEMB) on the basis of their population which was determined by the central census department of Afghanistan. Each province was allocated at least two seats. According to the constitution, the number of seats to be allocated to women in lower house should be twice the number of the provinces in the country. Thus at least 68 seats in lower house were reserved for women - almost 25 per cent. The Constitution provides that even if a woman could not secure the majority vote, she can become part of the parliament through quota system. Afghan constitution also guarantees 17 per cent seats of the Mesharano Jirga for women. The President is constitutionally obliged to select 17 women out of his stipulated quota of 34 seats.

190 of 193 countries in the world now have some form of functioning parliament, accounting for over 46,000 representatives. The existence of a parliament is as important as that democracy cannot exist without a parliament. In modern Afghanistan, The first parliamentary elections were held on September 18, 2005, after a delay of one year. There was tough competition among 2800 candidates for 249 seats of the lower house which showed the high degree of the interest in the

election. Candidates from different political and ideological backgrounds participated and made their way to the parliament. Afghan elections were based on Single Non-Transferable Vote system. The candidates were not allowed to contest the elections as formal representatives of any political or religious parties.

Majority of the Afghans were optimistic that parliament would be a good omen for them and considered it a good system for their coming generations. People expected that the new parliament will balance the power of executive and stop the widespread corruption in the administration and will protect the Islamic identity of the state. They expected that parliament could overcome all the challenges facing the nation both from within and without. They believed that their voices, aspirations and wishes will have a way to the top leadership through the Parliament. Some women, on the other hand, expected the parliament to give them representation in decision making as there were quota reserved for them.

Unlike the expectations, they have been faced with dissimilar challenges particularly in last two years. They were blamed for being involved in lawlessness, being expired their legal terms of duty, blocking their decisions by government and also being targeted by terrorists. According to their legal power, they have dismissed a number of ministers due to shortcomings in their performance and their failure to spend all allocated budgetary funds but the Afghan Presidential Palace has criticized the dismissal of the ministers thereafter sent the case to the Supreme Court for law interpretation yet the destiny of dismissed ministers are not clear and still the several ministries are run by caretakers.

Meanwhile, the Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security (RIWSP) on Tuesday issued its fourth annual report on the performance of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament) and said that last year parliament performed better with legislation, but its oversight on the performance of government remained weak and that lawmakers failed to ensure true representation of their clients. According to the report, lawmakers in parliament sometimes considered their ethnic background when dealing with impeachments and summoning sessions. The report states that the lawmakers continued to grapple with problems while setting up their internal rule procedures and absence of the lawmakers from parliamentary sessions also undermined access of their clients to their representatives. "Holding meetings without reaching a consensus, leaving meetings before concluding the meetings, underestimating the house procedure, involvement of the lawmakers in their personal business, and leaving the meetings without getting an answer to the question asked during the summoning sessions are the main issues," the report stated. "There are shortcomings and deficiencies, we need the topics debated to be implemented and executed including the implementation of the approvals and the laws," said MP Dawoud Kalakani.

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Counting the Fatalities

By Hujjatullah Zia

In spite of these spectacular strides in science and technology, and still unlimited ones to come, something basic is missing. There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers," these words have been spoken by a famous Nobel Laureate Martin Luther King.

The vacuum for tolerance and acceptance is felt strongly among human societies, especially with the radical practices of religious ideologues. People are killed on the grounds of their caste, color and creed around the globe and terrorist networks seek to stoke sectarianism. Human rights and liberty are violated to a great extent since war and violence continue unabated. The spirit of brotherhood is missing and life has turned cheap. The terrorist networks inflicted heavy casualties upon individuals from different races and religions and the pace and scope of the killing are dizzying. Some 300 members of families blown apart by bombs as they celebrated the end of Ramadan in Baghdad. Forty-nine dead at the Istanbul airport, 40 more in Afghanistan. Nine Italians, seven Japanese, three students at American universities and one local woman brutalized in the diplomatic quarter of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The bodies piled up on a bus in Somalia, at a mosque and video club in Cameroon, at a shrine in Saudi Arabia.

All that carnage was in a single week - a single week of summer in what feels like an endless stream of terror attacks. Orlando and Beirut. Paris and Nice and St. Etienne-du-Rouvray, France. Germany and Japan and Egypt. Each bomb or bullet tearing holes in homes and communities. The oldest victim was, reportedly, Sevinc Gokay, an 84-year-old retired civil servant who was killed in Ankara. The youngest were not even born: Two pregnant women were killed along with the babies they carried; a third, Songul Bektas, survived but lost her pregnancy in its third trimester. There were 17 victims 10 or younger; and 27 ages 11 to 17. There were Jews and Christians and atheists, and at least one Hindu, but 151 of the victims, 61 percent, were Muslim.

A Taliban splinter group claimed to be targeting Christians at the Lahore Park, Pakistan. But most of those killed there, too, were Muslim - like Zubaida Amjad, 40, who knew the Quran by heart and was teaching her 12-year-old daughter, Momina Amjad, to recite the verses. The girl was killed, too.

In Brussels, Ankara and Istanbul, the attacks ended lives that had been lived in relative security. In Nigeria, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where terror and violence lurk around every corner, some families found themselves in familiar postures of mourning. Last year, Afghan nation left a deadly year behind. As a result, the UN reported that war had caused more than 8,000 civilian casualties, including nearly 2,600 deaths, in the first nine months of 2016.

To consider Syria's war, approximately 400,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict that dates back to a 2011 popular uprising against Assad's regime, according to the UN. In addition, about five million have fled into neighboring countries over the years, while six million remain internally displaced. The UN has described the situation as the "biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time". Bombings destroyed crowded cities and horrific human rights violations are widespread. Needless to say, terrorism is a serious threat to the men's rights and dignity and scores of individuals fall victim to the radical ideology of warring parties - which make no bone about shedding the blood of innocent people or dishonoring them. They pay no heed to national or international laws and sacrifice moral standards and religious tenets for satiating their carnal desire and megalomania. In another item, the terrorist networks resort to war and violence to break the lump in their throats made by deprivations and poverty. Despite religious emphasis on respecting men's rights and dignity, they trample upon their rights in the worst possible way.

It is believed that nonviolence and nurturing the spirit of brotherhood will build the utopia of human societies. The current dystopia, which is filled with fear and hatred and the blood of men, women, and children, is the result of radicalism and intolerance. In other words, exercising upon the "golden rule" and accepting the individuals as they are, regardless of their accidental backgrounds, will decrease violence and carnage around the globe. After all, the hotbed of radicalism and its supporting factors should be abolished so that the terrorist networks no more find room for their activities.

We have to consider that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Without tolerating one another, peace is not possible and the flagrant violation of human rights and dignity will continue and human societies will always count their fatalities which is a great tragedy for the entire world. Moreover, practicing upon moral values will also alleviate the challenges Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com



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