

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



July 20, 2017

Accountability is the Key to Good Governance

One of the key requirements of good governance is accountability. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. The institutions in Afghanistan, on the other hand, have lacked this basic factor which has resulted in uncontrolled corruption and mismanagement. Therefore, it can be easily observed that billions of dollars have been spent for the development of the country yet the country is not able to develop as much as it could. As a matter of fact, accountability can be achieved when there is transparency and the rule of law.

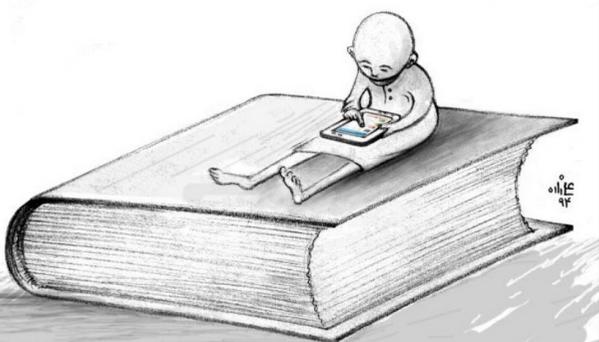
In a democratic country the ultimate authority lies within the people. And ultimately, the government is answerable to the people. Moreover, to guarantee such accountability the modern states have established and strengthened their political systems in such a way that people have most of the power, though indirectly. However, in our country, Afghanistan, which claims to be democratic, the people are suffering because of the lack of any sort of accountability of the government and the deprivation of participation in the affairs of the state. One of the basic ways the people can participate in the affairs of the state is through elections. Well-established and developed election systems can provide opportunities to all the members of the society to cast their votes and have their say in the making of the government. However, in Afghanistan this basic institution of democracy has not been able to function appropriately. The last presidential elections were vehemently dominated by fraud and corruption.

The proper and well-developed election process can play an important role in creating accountable government. A political party or a politician in order to be elected by the votes of the people tries to perform properly so that it gets chance of remaining in authority for a longer period of time. If the political parties and the contestants in the elections come to know that they can win the election even without the consent of the people, through illegal ways, they will never remain accountable to the people and would not care much about the public opinion. Afghan political scenario, at the moment, is facing almost a similar sort of situation.

Another issue of unaccountability arises when a system is made personality-oriented, wherein the individuals are prioritized on the basis of their actual or assumed personality traits. This property is mostly found in dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government. Such ideologies are basically the remnants of the monarchies that could be found long ago in human history.

The institutions, which can play a dominant role in establishing democratic culture and accountable system, are underestimated and even ignored in such systems. Our country Afghanistan happens to be a similar country. The democratic institutions are ignored to a great extent while the political system circulates around the personalities. Even the election system is designed in such a way that promotes personality-worship. The absence of political parties and their influence within election system have made many overlook the importance of political parties which happen to be very important institution for the growth and institutionalization of democracy. It is necessary for accountability that not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Afghan government, on the other hand, has been formed in such a way that it is difficult to hold the government accountable for its policies and actions. As a matter of fact accountability can be achieved when there is transparency and the rule of law. However, both these characteristics seem to be non-existent in Afghan society. Transparency and rule of law can be maintained when there is proper separation of power and the different organs of state can function on their own - independently. In fact, judiciary and law enforcement agencies must be capable to hold the law as the top priority matter. In Afghan political system the separation of powers is not clear and the judiciary is composed of what the government decides. Moreover, the powerful and the rich are mostly considered above the law and the poor and weak have to go through the 'quagmire of law and order system'. The present rise in corruption, which is now turning out of control, is because of the same fact that the powerful are not made accountable to the rule of law. A thorough analysis of Afghanistan's political scenario will depict that currently the political processes are also being kept aloof of accountability along with the institutions. The current efforts for the reconciliation and reintegration processes are very much non-participatory and non-transparent. As the major stakeholders are being kept away from the processes, a sort of ambiguity and distrust is being generated within different circles and the people of Afghanistan. Moreover, there is a disadvantage of such an approach as well - it is likely to result in improper and incomplete outcomes of the processes, which will further generate controversies.

Afghan authorities have in fact kept on striving to limit the power and authority to themselves and, on certain occasions, have used the same irresponsibly. The need of time is to make the political institutions and processes accountable to the people through proper democratization of the political structure.



Afghanistan's Peace Prospect

By Liaqat Ali Amini

Peace has remained elusive in Afghanistan and all efforts made in this regard came to a stalemate. Several institutions were established with the hope of replacing war with political discourse and peace, but the war continued unabated.

The Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) was founded when wars escalated and thousands of Afghan and foreign soldiers were fighting deadly battles against the Taliban. Unlike previous institutions, the HPC has begun its activities with stronger will and determination so as to gain new achievements. However, the struggles made by HPC met failure in the process of time and the armed groups gained upper hand in the conflicts and capitalized on HPC with having their prisoners released from Afghan and Pakistani prisons and Guantanamo and strengthened their stronghold against the government.

The public, civil and legal institutions highly disapproved of HPC stressing its inefficiency. The government was urged constantly to shut it down and invest its budget on defensive strategy and soldiers. The government, however, turned down the demand and kept up supporting it. Recently, the Afghan government seeks to strengthen this institution and facilitate it more than ever before. The appointment of new chairperson and increasing fresh forces in the administrative structure of this institution reflects the officials' optimism and their intention to pave the ground for peace talks.

The head of HPC stated that he would present his new strategy regarding the negotiation of peace with warring parties so as to gain new achievements and put an end to the conflicts.

Nonetheless, it appears that peace is changed into a complicated issue in Afghanistan and the solution to this problem is highly difficult since peace in the country is an international issue rather than national one.

At the national level, a public consensus seems to be the cornerstone of peace. Peace process will not give the desired result unless it is backed by a wide-ranging people's supports, which was proved in the past.

To gain national support, peace process should be defined and needs to be pointed out that whom the peace will be held with and on the basis of which circumstances. It is estimated that the public supported peace process and HPC in no way and the process continued without involving the nation.

The government and HPC are advised to attract the support of nation and civil and legal institution and change

their negative stance into positive one. Otherwise, this process is doomed to failure.

At international level, active lobbying is needed to regain the lost trust and attract the attention of foreign institutions regarding the new policy of HPC. The state must take effort to gain the support of Afghanistan's allies, mainly in removing the obstacles which are hampering the process.

Pakistan needs to change its stance regarding Afghan peace process. It is believed that bringing in peace will be next to impossible in the country unless Islamabad and Pakistani officials change their policy for better.

Islamabad's new approach towards Afghanistan's peace process is not for paving the ground for a genuine talk, but due to being influenced by regional and international policy, being observed recently. The issue of Qatar and suppression of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group in Iraq and Syria and the US new strategy regarding Afghanistan, which also include Pakistan, have prompted Pakistani officials to move swiftly.

In a recent statement, a Pakistani official said that supporting peace in Afghanistan was a priority and Pakistan was ready to cooperate honestly with Kabul government. Kabul must prioritize political incentives and invite the Taliban to peace dialogue. Sartaj Aziz, Pakistani national security adviser, also emphasized peace talks as the only effective option.

Meanwhile, he magnified the Taliban as a powerful group which had the ability to fight for many years in Afghanistan. Afghan government should try to provide peace and stability in the country through negotiation rather than war.

Although Pakistan has constantly expressed its preparation for cooperating with Afghan government, it gave lip service and did not fulfill its promise in this respect. So, Pakistan is hoped to change its policy without being pressurized by regional or international powers.

To sum up, the HPC will gain the necessary achievements if all sides - national and international bodies - include peace process in their agenda and take fundamental step in accordance with the government's policy. The HPC should realize that this national process will not bear the desired fruit unless the council include all the components of this trend in its agenda and illustrate the prospect of peace in this war-torn country with diplomacy and management.

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Nonstop Bleeding Around the Globe

By Hujjatullah Zia

The carnage and bloodshed, which continue globally in a massive scale, inflict indescribable pain and sufferings upon nations. The flagrant violation of human rights and dignity is not necessarily the result of extremism and dogmatic mindsets of religious fundamentalists but also the violent practices of states which show no respect to international instruments.

For instance, religious fundamentalists stoke sectarian violence and kill people on the grounds of their race, color and creed. Lacking tolerance, claiming religious superiority and acting upon ideological dogma, they massacre men, women and children in cold blood and humiliate them in the worst possible way.

Since warring parties - which are constituted of ideologues and mercenaries fighters - value neither religious nor international rules, will continue their violent acts of horror and terror without an iota of mercy. In brief, their radical ideology and warped minds are the main reason behind their practices.

However, a number of states are involved in deadly battles and violate human rights in the worst possible way despite approving the charter of the United Nation or Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Political conflicts and interests are more likely to prompt states to trample upon human rights and dignity.

Reports are replete with tragic scenes and human casualties taken place around the human societies. To view the recent reports of the UN about human rights, one's senses will go numb regarding the tragedies and high graph of human fatalities.

According to a report released by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 1,662 civilians were killed and more than 3,500 wounded with deaths in the capital Kabul accounting for nearly 20 per cent of the toll in the first half of 2017.

The majority of the victims were killed by anti-government forces, including the resurgent Taliban and in attacks claimed by self-styled Islamic State (IS) group, the report said. The UN's special envoy to Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto said the human cost of the conflict remains "far too high".

The ground offensives by Afghan security forces are the second leading cause of civilian casualties, though UNAMA said there had been a 10 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2016.

To view the UN's report about Yemen, at least 20 civilians were killed in a Saudi-led coalition air attack in its southwest. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said it was "deeply shocked and saddened at reports of the

deaths and injuries of a number of internally displaced persons in an aerial attack" on the area. The UN says that with the start of the Saudi-led coalition's attack, the conflict has killed more than 10,000 people, forced millions from their homes, damaged infrastructure and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

Human rights violation has turned widespread in Myanmar, where officials seek to prevent the UN investigators as Myanmar declined to grant visas to three UN-appointed experts who would probe allegations of abuse against the minority group by the armed forces. Human Rights Watch warned that Myanmar's government risked getting bracketed with "pariah states" like North Korea and Syria if it did not allow the UN to investigate alleged crimes.

The north of Myanmar's Rakhine state has been under lockdown since October, when the military launched a security operation in response to what it claims was an attack by Rohingya armed men on border posts, in which nine police officers were killed. The UN has estimated more than 90,000 Rohingya Muslims to be forced to flee their homes since the start of the crackdown. A UN report in February said the campaign against the Rohingya, who were stripped of their citizenship in 1982, "very likely" amounted to war crimes.

The three reports released recently by the UN reflect widespread violation of human rights and day-to-day practices of violence and bloodshed either by warring parties or states. Such reports make headlines on national and international newspapers.

However, the gut-wrenching stories of human catastrophes and tragic scenes will hardly provoke a sense of public empathy for being repeated every day. These incidents might be followed by a word of condemnation but will never heal the bleeding wounds of victims.

Regardless of religious and moral obligations, we are more likely to be alienated from our humanity. Indeed, when I am not moved with the blood oozing from the sliced throats of my brothers and sisters, my humanity will be under question. I wonder which human rights the world is debating about!

The rights and dignity of mankind are trampled under the boots of soldiers and barrel of militants' guns, but the world claims to have approved international instruments, mainly the UDHR! It is hoped that the international community will take practical step in alleviating the pain and sufferings of human societies.

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