

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



July 25, 2016

Peaceful Protestors Targeted by Suicide Bombers

A twin suicide attack targeted the gathering of a mass demonstration staged by Hazaras against the TUTA route change in capital Kabul. It was the second mass protest in Kabul by the protestors and it has taken the shape of movement, which is called as the Enlightening Movement and it aims to stop the TUTA implementation through Salang and change it through Bamyán, which the movement says is its actual route.

The suicide attacks were ferocious and around 61 people were killed while 231 sustained injuries. The incident took place in Deh Mazang area where the demonstrators had gathered for a sit-in protest. Some reports say that one explosion happened near the Barikot Cinema and the second occurred in Demazang Square.

It is really tragic to see the peaceful protestors face such heartbreaking fortune. The terrorists took full advantage of the situation and penetrated through the security arrangements and targeted the poor civilians who were not doing anything other than asking for their rights. It was the responsibility of the security agencies to ensure full security of the protestors. However, they were not able to do so and two to three suicide bombers could get in the rally. The security personnel were busy more with blocking the roads so that the protestors do not get near the Presidential Palace instead of providing pool-proof security to them. It is right of every citizen to raise their voice for their rights and protest peacefully in that regard and the democratic government must ensure that they are provided the opportunity to do so.

The reports suggest that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh claimed responsibility behind the horrific attack and said the group targeted a Shiite gathering in the city. This is the first time the terror group has claimed responsibility behind a large attack in capital Kabul as the loyalists of the terror group have been attempting to expand terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani on Saturday condemned the twin explosion in the rally in capital Kabul and ordered government institutions to use all resources for the rehabilitation of wounded persons. A statement from Presidential Palace said the president was shocked and was saddened after hearing about two huge explosions in a peaceful rally. The president said despite strict security measures the terrorist managed to enter to the rally and carry out the explosions which resulted in the killing and injuring of innocent people including security officials. Meanwhile, World leaders strongly condemned attack as well. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has said that the attack targeted those who protested for their humanitarian rights. "I reiterate that international humanitarian law prohibits the deliberate targeting of civilians and international human rights law requires the government and non-state actors to respect and protect the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. The perpetrators of today's attack must be held accountable," he added.

The top priority matter at the moment is to ensure that the wounded get proper treatment and health facilities. There should be efforts to find the true culprits behind the incident and they should be brought to justice. It has to be ensured that such peaceful and exemplary protests must be encouraged so that the democratic norms must be strengthened in the country and the protestors should be provided full-proof security every time they stage such protests. Moreover, the government, particularly President Ashraf Ghani, needs to hear the voices of the protestors seriously. The concerned authorities must analyze the demands of the Enlightening Movement with justice. It requires opening German engineering consultancy - Fichtner's report, that suggested in 2013, in an assessment for ADB that Bamiyan route would avoid the narrow space and difficulties along the Salang Pass, would allow connecting further generation by coal fired power plants along the route and would secure power supply of Kabul and south Afghanistan by using a separate route. In May, after the first round of the historic protest in Kabul, President Ghani had promised that instead of TUTA another power project would be designed for central provinces that would provide around 300 kV of electricity; however, the promise was not accepted wholly by the movement. Therefore, the second round of protest was organized. It is important to note that the ambiguities and back-door decisions led to misunderstandings regarding the change in route. Government, in this regard, needs to remove all these ambiguities and it requires a solid reason to ignore the Fichtner report, which is based on technical suggestions not political inclinations. Throwing everything on the shoulders of the previous government would not solve the issue. The government needs to stop the work on the TUTA, resolve the issue completely by taking the people in confidence and make decision on the basis of justice and fair-play.



Obstacles before Democracy

By Hujjatullah Zia

In democratic systems, discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, color or creed is not acceptable. All individuals are entitled to exercise their rights and dignity without barriers. Their natural and inalienable rights, bestowed by the Creator, are inviolable. And "government of the people, for the people and by the people" will leave no room for curtailing the public freedom and violating their human rights.

A constitution which is approved by people's representatives based on international criteria, i.e. recognizing the citizens' basic rights namely the rights to life, liberty and property without distinction or discrimination, will nurture one's hope for stronger democracy. Citizens are supposed to be treated equally in the eye of law regardless of their social or political status. Segregating a minority group from the main body of society or simply from social services, etc. will be a slap in the face of democracy and put the entire government under question. In such a case, since freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are remarkable elements in a democratic administration, the segregated individuals can voice their concerns, individually or through forming an assembly, for their rights. With the downfall of the Taliban's regime, Afghanistan took significant steps towards democratization. Establishing Constitution based on international standards, conducting elections and founding parliament, which is considered the beating heart of democracy, are the milestones in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. Constitutionally, the government is committed to form a violent-free society, wherein citizens will be able to exercise their civil rights without violence and bloodshed, support the public rights and freedom, strengthen national unity and regain the Afghanistan's position in the international level through demonstrating democracy via fighting against injustice, cruelty, corruption, lawlessness, etc. As a result, the Constitution, which was approved in January 2004, states in article 6 as, "The state shall be obligated to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, preservation of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, attainment of national unity as well as equality between all peoples and tribes and balance development of all areas of the country."

However, despite having an immaculate constitution and establishing a democratic state, people's rights and liberty are challenged in one way or another. In other words, although Afghanistan achieved greatly following the Taliban's dictatorial regime, there are a lot to be done. People are still the casualty of discrimination and injustice. The relentless corruption in government's machinery has paralyzed the democratic values and the individuals are judged based on their social and political status rather than provisions of law. To

put it in another item, the words of law and social practices in daily life go into two different directions. After all, it is really disappointing to see that law is violated more by the individuals who claim to be law enforcement personnel. For instance, the corruption in judicial system and among the police is uncontrollable and sucks the blood of ordinary people. Who dare open his/her lips?

Democracy is under a serious doubt in Afghanistan, mainly when one notices in national and international papers that this country is still at the top of most corrupt countries, the most unlucky place for women and children, the largest opium producer, etc. It is believed that simply boasting about ideal human rights, freedom and dignity articulated in the constitution will not reflect democracy but how much the law is enforced and to what extent people are able to exercise their rights and liberty under the state's support. It is right that presidential and parliamentary elections were conducted in Afghanistan, but how was the transparency level in the election? Do you not think that the legal period of the current parliament is over and it is operating no more on the basis of law? I will not mention streams of blood being spilt almost every day by the militant groups; I simply talk about legal challenges which threaten our social life. If one justifies the security problems through a thousand and one reasons brought by officials such as three decades of war, the interference of neighboring countries, etc. s/he will never justify the corruption, which is the root of many other challenges, going on in government's machinery. The widely undemocratic practices in collective life, lack of law enforcement, discriminatory treatments, etc. will demonstrate the administration undemocratic.

As article 6, mentioned above, articulates the state's responsibility, which one of those obligations is fulfilled up to now? Protecting human rights? Forming a prosperous and progressing society? Strengthening national unity? What about the presidential agenda which made the mouth of the audience water during the campaigns? Afghanistan's economy was supposed to develop on a large scale, as stated in the agenda, and the nation was to enjoy a prosperous life. Considering the status quo, one will think that the agenda was an irony since the country is in the grip of financial crisis and democracy seems deceptive. So, there are many challenges which hamper the growth of democracy in our community and the vacuum for a true spirit of democracy is widely felt in our social and political life. It is hoped that the state will ensure the rights and liberty of the people irrespective of their racial, sexual and religious backgrounds.

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Carnage in Kabul

By Dilawar Sherzai

It was one of the most shocking scene when the peaceful demonstrators on the streets of Kabul were brutally targeted by suicide bombers. Three attackers with suicide vests attacked the Hazara protestors who were raising their voice for changing Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan (TUTA) power project route through Bamiyan. Two of the attackers blasted themselves among the protestors while the third one was killed by the security forces. The attack resulted in death of more than 80 people and injury to over 200 others and thus marked one of the most tragic incidents in Afghanistan's recent history.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh claimed responsibility behind the horrific attack and said the group targeted a Shiite gathering in the city. This is the first time the terror group has claimed responsibility behind a large attack in capital Kabul as the loyalists of the terror group have been attempting to expand terrorist activities in Afghanistan. This comes at a time when the government and security authorities are of the opinion that the group is being controlled by them. This particular attack by Daesh clearly depicts its intentions and the authorities must do something really serious to control in true sense before it is able to target more innocent people on the basis of sect and ignite a sectarian clash within the country.

The incident was so tragic and heart-breaking that many countries and United Nations (UN) condemned it emphatically. UN called it a war crime; United Nation's Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) chief Tadamichi Yamamoto said in a statement, "An attack deliberately targeting a large, concentrated group of civilians amounts to a war crime. This incident is an outrage that cannot be justified. It is an attempt to spread terror amongst civilians and stifle the freedoms that Afghans have sacrificed so much to obtain. The United Nations stands firmly with the people of Afghanistan as they seek to exercise their fundamental human rights." Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said, "The United States condemns in the strongest terms the horrific attack in Kabul, which has left more than 80 dead and hundreds wounded... The heinous attack was made all the more despicable by the fact that it targeted a peaceful demonstration by members of the minority Hazara community... As we reaffirmed at the NATO Warsaw Summit, the US and the international community stand firm in our ongoing support for the people and government of Afghanistan."

Beside condemnation, the top priority matter at the moment is to ensure that the wounded get proper treatment and health facilities. There should be efforts to find the true culprits be-

hind the incident and they should be brought to justice. It has to be ensured that such peaceful and exemplary protests must be encouraged so that the democratic norms must be strengthened in the country and the protestors should be provided full-proof security every time they stage such protests. Moreover, the Afghan government, particularly President Ashraf Ghani, needs to hear the voices of the protestors seriously regarding TUTAP. TUTAP is basically a 500 kV electricity power project, financed by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and is meant to transfer electricity from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan to Afghanistan.

From Afghanistan's point of view this project is very much necessary in supporting the electricity infra-structure in the country and provide people with reliable electric energy throughout the year. This project can also support Afghanistan in realizing the promises of CASA-1000, as without TUTA Afghanistan cannot serve as transit system for transmitting electricity from Central Asian countries to South Asia because of the incapacity to export bulk of energy.

In an assessment in November 2015, Asian Development Bank (ADB) mentioned, "Afghanistan needs a unified national electricity grid. Different parts of Afghanistan's networks are supplied as passive islands by power fed from Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Because of asynchronous grid operations in these countries, the current network configuration is highly inflexible." TUTA will thus support in bringing these networks together and allow flexibility in supply and provide efficiency in load dispatch. The project seems to be of immense importance but, unfortunately, it is facing a controversy because of its route. It has been, somehow, decided that the project would follow the route through Salang but there are many analysts, politicians and people who suggest that it had to pass through central Bamiyan province. The most notable among them is the German engineering consultancy - Fichtner, that suggested in 2013, in an assessment for ADB that Bamiyan route would avoid the narrow space and difficulties along the Salang Pass, would allow connecting further generation by coal fired power plants along the route and would secure power supply of Kabul and south Afghanistan by using a separate route.

Hazaras throughout Afghanistan carried out protests in this regard as well. The first round of the protests were held in May, after which President Ghani had promised that instead of TUTA another power project would be designed for central provinces that would provide around 300 kV of electricity; however, the promise was not accepted wholly by the movement.

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