

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



May 07, 2018

### Pursuing True Democracy

One of the basic issues in Afghanistan is that there has not been any transition of the society, at the grass root level, towards a true democracy. Though we claim our country to be democratic, we lack all the qualities that are required to nourish a democratic country in true sense. In fact, it is not just the rulers who form democracy; rather a democratic system is always developed by the society as whole.

Democracy is not like monarchy, where a single person took all the decisions of the nation. The subjects were bound to follow what the kings used to order them. Though in certain cases some of the individuals or groups could question the orders of the kings, on most of the occasions they would be accepted unchallenged. And, the system used to largely depend on the wills of the kings. If the king used to be somewhat merciful, the system would be lenient comparatively and people would have some sort of blessings, otherwise, mostly the kings were authoritarian, despotic and tyrant.

A democratic system on the other hand, largely depends on the nature of the people as a whole. As the system is people centered, the role of the people as a whole stands paramount in a democratic system. There are certain qualities that should be possessed by the people within a democratic country; otherwise, the experience of democracy would never produce the desired results.

Our struggle with the democratic system is largely nullified by the attitude of our people. As the experience of the system is new for most of the people, they are not sure of their roles and responsibilities. They still believe that the rulers have all the duty and they must change the circumstances. In this way they can also put most of the blames of the drawbacks in the system on the rulers and, themselves, avoid responsibilities.

However, it is really imperative to comprehend that such an attitude would never help us in bringing any change within our system. Though, 13 years can be considered very little as far as the experience of democracy is concerned, we have not been able to learn as much as we should have learnt by now or as much as we could have learnt, considering the opportunities and assistance that were available for us. For us it is not necessary to go through a lengthy evolutionary process of democracy like the other nations of the world; as we have the examples of others before us and we can easily learn from them. Today's great democracies in the world had to go through the lengthy processes because they did not have the examples of others before them.

For the nourishment of democracy it is vital that all the members of the society must play their roles; there is no other option. Along with the political efforts, we would require amending our conscience and our inner selves, as well. The departure or distance from democracy would only spoil us to a further extend. Now that we have decided to welcome it with open arms we require changing ourselves. As an individual, first of all, we need to change our behavior. A democratic behavior is largely based on the art of proper speaking and the patience to listen carefully. Democracy supports the freedom of expression and allows everyone to say what he wants to say. In democracy we basically accept the sort of environment wherein we can be opposed openly. Those people who support democracy fundamentally want that the issues should be solved through dialogue and reasoning not through violence. They want that the opposite reasons should be listened to sufficiently and the claims should always be reconsidered.

We have dishonesty in our intentions and extremism in our actions. The difference in opinion and thoughts are dealt through intolerance and even violence. Our statements have taken the shape of threats. The true spirit of democracy can only be found in the theories and promises; therefore, the people do not see the true practice of it and are ambiguous about it. This is really unfortunate that at this instance of hope and great expectations we are suffering from these problems; yet, we do not have to be disheartened.

If we really like democracy and democratic values, we would require making its prerequisites possible. We would need to feel our responsibility in order to lead our country towards true democracy; otherwise, the dream of democracy may shatter and we will not be able to recreate it. Though the roles of individuals are paramount, some of the responsibilities go to those leaders and religious scholars who have great influence in forming the opinion and the attitude of the people. They need to understand that instead of sowing the seeds of hatred and intolerance in the minds and hearts of the people, they can spread love and tolerance and they can really participate in forming an environment that is suitable for democracy.



### Learning from China the Art of living in Harmony with Nature

By Hujjatullah Zia

The charm and attraction oozing from Chinese rich cultural heritage and tourist destinations will fill one with a strong sense of excitement. You will be immersed in the pleasure of nature when the gentle breeze caresses your hair and mild music plays with your ears at a moonlit night in the hometown of panda, Sichuan province. The hearty smile of the Chinese will add to your pleasure.

Finding yourself in the pure bosom of nature in Sichuan province will fill you with an outpouring of delight. Cruising river in Jintang County will be a sweet memory in my life. It was an amazing night when Chinese folk music was accompanying me and my journalist friends in the heart of the Pi River. The stars were twinkling, water was spraying from fountains, and tourists were cruising with big smile on their lips.

The diversity of delicious food in Sichuan province is an important element of Chinese culture. You will wolf down nutritious sea food, meat and vegetable due to their unique taste. Do not forget the dessert, herbal tea and fruit.

The tall infrastructures and skyscrapers kiss sky in Sichuan province. Their modern and unique architecture has beautified the city to a great extent. However, the villas surrounding Pi River as well as on hillsides in Jintang County amaze all tourists. People enjoy the peace and quiet of rural life.

All Chinese, whether living in skyscrapers or in villas, have the hearts of gold and welcome tourists from across the world with open arm. They treat tourists with great respect and hearty smile. If you visit Sichuan province, you will feel it like your home. It is really hard to put the real characteristics of this province into words. Your jaw will drop with the charm and attraction of nature and tourist destinations, the allure of traditional and modern architecture, the nice treatment of people, the tasty local food and fruit, etc.

Chinese officials constantly urge on living in harmony with nature. They believe that humans are able to live a harmonious and peaceful life with nature through protecting the climate, saving water from dirt, promoting forestation and greenery, producing harmless hydro power for facilities, etc. Therefore, Chinese government supports all the aforementioned issues seriously and have built the structure in a way that citizens tend not to pollute the environment.

One of the main reasons behind rural development in China is that the government has not overlooked developing rural econ-

omy. In other words, Chinese government seeks to bridge the gap between rural and urban life. Therefore, the poverty alleviation project, which is supposed to be completed till 2020, covers every nook and cranny of China and all citizens will be lifted out of poverty in one way or another. It seems that provincial governors compete in developing the provinces they are responsible for. Officials are highly committed in promoting the life of citizens - be it in rural or urban areas.

Chinese government is strongly contributing to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which will be highly fruitful for China in particular and for the rest of the world in general. Through BRI, cities and countries will be connected via "one road" to bridge the gap between the life of rural and urban residents. It will also connect Asia and Europe to facilitate trade and import-export for all countries. China has invested tremendously in this regard in many of its provinces including Sichuan province.

All developing and underdeveloped countries, mainly Afghanistan, need to learn from China the art of living in harmony with nature. Afghanistan is in need of a strong support from the government to preserve the nature and keep the climate clean. First and foremost, the garbage system should be promoted for having a clean atmosphere especially in crowded cities. Paying heed to even basic facilities will be a great contribution to a clean climate. For example, if washing rooms are built with small distances in cities and garbage cans are installed, citizens will not tend to pollute the weather. This is the first step for underdeveloped countries to take. Second, the government has to promote forestation and plant trees to prevent from pollution.

Moreover, Afghan government has to pay attention to cultural heritage and historical monuments to attract tourists and promote the country's economy, this is what China is practicing. Tourists does not necessarily mean to come from foreign countries. The annual domestic tourists will be also of great importance.

Both Afghanistan and China has 5000 years history and rich cultural heritage. China also started from zero after suffering war. Thanks to four decades of reform and opening up which changed China from one of the poorest countries to the second world's economy. Hence, China is a perfect example for Afghanistan to learn from so that Afghan people also be able to live in harmony with nature.

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

### IEC Should Reconsider Conditions for Candidates' Registration

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) decision to set conditions for nominees in the upcoming parliamentary and district level general elections to submit voters' IDs along with their application to nominate for either parliament or district council seats has created space and opportunities for illegal activities on the part of some potential candidates. IEC requires a nominee for parliament to submit one thousand and a nominee for district council to submit one hundred attested Tazkira or Afghan National identity cards (Afghan IDs). The illegal practices include purchase of Afghan IDs by certain candidates from vulnerable voters for Afs.2000 to Afs5000, and constitution of teams manned by male and female workers by candidates to encourage families and individual voters to accept money for their votes. In addition, local eyewitnesses in less stable regions such as Kunduz province, have reported about influential, existing members of parliament cracking in IEC recruitment process and have introduced scores of people of their own kinship for recruitment by the commission. These IEC personnel will be assigned at ballot stations across the province, which can be a potential for rigged and unfair elections results. Possibilities of these events repeating themselves across the country loom large.

In the face of ongoing threats to voters from insurgents and various other terrorist groups, who have already issued warnings to, and threatened people not to participate in the upcoming elections, pressure from candidates to obtain voters' Afghan IDs by offering them money has added to complications in the whole electoral process. Ordinary masses are starting to lose faith and confidence in the ongoing electoral process. Local people in Baghlan and Kunduz provinces say that Taliban have imposed Afs.50,000/- in addition to other punishment for those who go to ballot stations and cast their votes in the upcoming elections. Afghan social and political landscape continues to evolve in an unorthodox shape. People in power and privilege pull out ladder behind them once they reach certain success heights, and leave the masses' miserable conditions unchanged. They continue to exploit opportunities and power - given to them by the very people who voted them - to suit self-interest. Under such draconian conditions, ordinary masses need support and leveled playing fields to exercise their right to vote under free and fair conditions in the upcoming elections. Government and IEC should take heed of ongoing blatant and explicit violations of rules by certain candidates. Buying Afghan IDs from ordinary, vulnerable voters is equivalent of committing serious fraud and usurping the very basic rights of the people to vote.

Given the present security situation of the country, people in many provinces cannot exercise their right to vote. For example in Kunduz province, the latest information about number of voters who registered themselves hardly reaches eight thousands while the number of potential candidates, who have unofficially started their election campaign, crosses the one hundred mark already! Kunduz city is besieged by insurgents, and many big centers of populations are under direct Taliban rule. People who live in main Kunduz city and to some extent, those who live in district centers across the province can go to vote. Majority of people who

live in countryside cannot go to vote. To implement IEC rules in Kunduz, the number of voters who are registered - about eight thousands by the time I wrote this article - can suffice eight candidates only, while total number of parliament members assigned from Kunduz is nine. This situation exacerbates the struggle by candidates to look for Afghan IDs more aggressively. Competition among candidates will increase, which would mean, offering more money and other privileges to voters in order to get their Afghan IDs. This very phenomenon of buying Afghan IDs by candidates evaporates legitimacy of elections right from the beginning. Those who have money will be privileged to participate in elections - no matter what their agendas would be - and those without money - no matter how hard they would like to work for their people and constituency - will not be able to nominate. Voters will be deprived of their rights to vote for their legitimate candidates. Ongoing economic woes of the people make them vulnerable to accept money. The notion that even though voters take money in exchange for their Afghan IDs from certain candidates, they can decide differently when voting at ballot boxes. This is not true in the context of Afghanistan. Afghan tradition and customs obliges people to adhere to their commitment once they take money from certain candidates. This is traditional and cannot be changed. Therefore, intervention from government and IEC is required at this critical moment.

It is undeniable fact that money always plays important role in elections around the world. Therefore, judicial and governmental rules and regulations are put in place to check and balance the effect of these rules. Countries with relative stability and security can easily implement those rules and regulations, but in the case of Afghanistan, where institutions are young, implementation of such rules and regulations to effect change in the field is not possible. In such circumstances, IEC and government should check and balance the outcome of their policies and take immediate and remedial steps in the event a drawback appears in electoral process. It will be sensible for IEC to retract from its decision, and abrogate conditions for candidates to submit one thousand and one hundred attested Afghan IDs to nominate for parliament and district councils. The steps to attest Afghan IDs anew, stick a strip on it, bearing serial number which is tagged to individuals' specifications are good enough and - if done well and implemented throughout the electoral process - can drastically reduce fraud and avoid a rigged elections. Instead of making the electoral process more cumbersome and difficult to handle, it is better to keep the rules simple and controllable, and focus on outcome by putting more efforts to make electoral process a success story. It is now time for IEC to lean hard on this and to abrogate these conditions the soonest the better. At this point in time, the very visible impacts of these conditions are to limit the number of candidates applying for nomination, but the damage it is making far more exceeds the perceived benefits. The objective to limit the number of candidates can be self-achieved by cumbersome and expensive campaign process required for a candidate to undertake after nomination. IEC should not become a factor in this.

The author is the emerging writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mg.sahibzada.ceo@kainaatgroup.af

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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