

Bleak election prospects in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan
24/7/04
The Nation

Afghanistan is in a deep state of turmoil these days and America is mainly responsible for all its ailments. During the recent summit meeting, held in Istanbul, it emerged that Europe and the rest of America's allies would, undoubtedly, extend their helping hand to Afghanistan, but major responsibility of pulling this war-ravaged country out of this quagmire would, however, lie with America.

During this NATO summit meeting matters, regarding its commitment to provide security for the forthcoming Afghan elections, were thoroughly discussed. Delegates attending the meeting noted with concern that in concrete terms, very little had been done to ensure security during elections. With this end in view, NATO authorities held out a promise that by September, they would send another 1500 troops to Afghanistan and another 2000 would remain in attendance and they would be despatched on as required basis. Main test of NATO troops would be to take over administrative control in the North of three PRTs and of a British run PRT in Mozen. Regrettably, there was no mention of any commitment of forces for the more troubled provinces. Also, there was no commitment to provide funds for completion of election formalities.

No doubt, European countries waxed eloquence in regarding Afghanistan as their top priority, but in actual fact, they decided to provide only bare minimum help and cooperation – that too, when it becomes unavoidable. Main cause of their lukewarm attitude is that they look upon Afghanistan as America's baby and as such, it is primarily the duty of the sole super-power to nurse the baby!

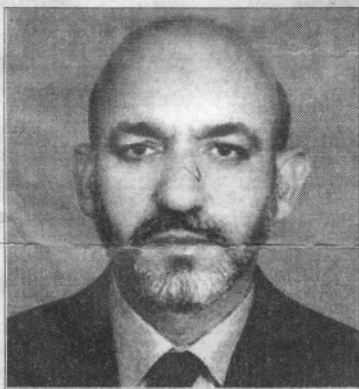
As things stand, law and order situation in Afghanistan is going from bad to worse with each day that passes and these awe no immediate signs of its early improvement. Hooliganism has been let loose to the extent that recently Karzai's intelligence chief in Herat was taken over by the forces, loyal to the local warlords. To add to Karzai's predicaments, partial disarming of militia scheduled for July 5, was also stopped in its tracks.

With regard to all-pervading law-

creating conducive environment for holding elections, by the end of September.

It is interesting to note that in the initial stages, the voter registration drive had gained sufficient momentum, but now, with passage of time, it has considerably slowed down, primarily due to insurgent attacks on the election workers in Jalalabad. Three of the incumbents had died on the spot, with the result that this heinous act had created panic both among the election workers and the registration forces in the south and southeast, has come to a virtual halt. On the contrary, bogus registration in the north, driven by the unscrupulous local warlord, has climbed to an all time high. The warlords are so powerful in their particular areas, that they conveniently dictate terms and no body can challenge their verdict.

In view of prevailing situation, it becomes abundantly clear that the process of bogus voter registration will considerably strengthen the hands of the warlords in the north



when elections are held. Viewed in the long-term perspective, too, the Pushtun majority will presumably be turned into a minority. This done, it will surely have disastrous results for the country. We feel that by not getting their names registered in the voters' list, the Pushtuns have failed to see

the forthcoming elections as an opportunity to offset what they perceive as their illegitimate marginalization in the power structure. The elections, in all likelihood, will, thus become a divisive force rather than a unifying force in Afghanistan. This will, then, be a sad day in the history of Afghanistan as in the past, despite many set-backs. Afghanistan had always successfully managed to resist an erosion of Afghani nationalism.

There are strong apprehensions that in view of growing lawlessness, elections will not be held on schedule. In addition to lawlessness, there are other bottlenecks in the Afghan policy. First is the issue of election law which has made it mandatory that the date of holding elections and the demarcation of constituencies for the parliament must be announced at least 90 days in advance. In the case of forthcoming Afghan

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With regard to all-pervading lawlessness, it is sad to mention that recently the police chief in Mazar-e-Sharif was confined to his home; his police force was disarrayed by the forces of Atta Mohammad, the local warlord and protégé of Defence Minister General Fahim. The police chief was accused of drug trafficking but in actual fact, Atta Mohammad himself wanted to grab this ill-gotten wealth. He would not allow anybody else to share the looting.

In the south and the southeast, law and order situation remains as fragile today as before. Karzai's appointed officials do not find themselves safe and they are unable to make any worthwhile contribution while performing their assigned duties. This being the state of affairs, Karzai is not in a position to restore law and order to this benighted country. He seems totally incapable of

cies for the parliament must be announced at least 90 days in advance. In the case of forthcoming Afghan elections, this condition has not been fulfilled. Hence, inescapable delay in holding elections.

Then there were around roughly 40,000 to 100,000 strong militia forces which, according to the original plan, were to be disarmed by the end of June. However, the number of those so far disarmed ranges between 3500 to 9000. Under the prevailing circumstances, it is rather naïve to believe that fair elections will be held. The presence of a very large number of militias all over the country and the dominating role of the warlords in the Afghan power-politics make things really difficult for the restoration of democratic order.

In sum, to quote Shakespeare, these elections, if at all held, will be no better than a Kale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing!