

Afghan Parliamentary Elections – A New Discussion

By Qadir Nayel

A distinguished columnist of the daily Jang and a senior analyst of Afghan issues, Rahimullah Yousafzai, in his article published in the daily Jang on November 13, 2010, under the title “Are the Afghan parliamentary elections disputed?” has written “in the national assembly (Wolesi Jirga) elections of September 8, a large number of Pashtuns did not cast their votes due to threats from the Taliban resulting in Hazara candidates winning the election. This can cause an ethnic imbalance in the assembly which can result in further destabilizing the already difficult situation in Afghanistan.” The well known analyst further wrote “Hazaras have a population of 30 million (it must have been a proof reading error. The writer must have written 3 million as the total population of Afghanistan is a little more than 30 million), which is at least 10 percent and at the most 15 percent of the total population and the Hazaras winning more than 50 percent seats will result in Hazaras gaining more seats than what their population should represent. This will empower a minority that has been under subjugation for a long time.” The said columnist not only misinterpreted the facts and figures but also exposed his linguistic discrimination and has tried to question the national integrity of Afghanistan.

In the recent parliamentary elections, even after winning 50 seats the Hazara people have not gained the representation they deserve, as agreed under the Bonn agreement. The Bonn agreement has accepted that the Hazaras constitute 19 percent of the total population of Afghanistan, which has been rejected by the Hazara political leaders as they claim Hazaras constitute at least 30 percent of the total population of the country. In the recent elections, while on one hand the voting percentage was low in Pashtun areas due to Taliban threats, on the other in the northern areas, particularly in the central areas of Afghanistan thousands of voters were deprived of their right to vote due to lack of ballot papers. As for as the province of Ghazni is concerned, Hazaras constitute 80 percent of its population. Therefore it is not a matter of surprise that the Hazara candidates have won a large number of seats from this province. In the district of Geru of this province which is inhabited by Pashtuns, only 8 persons voted. In the Hazara dominated areas of the same province all the available ballot papers were used in the first hour of the polling. In Malistan district of Ghazni 5,600 people could not cast their votes due to lack of ballot papers. In Jaghuri district 14,000 persons were deprived of their right to vote for the same reason whereas in Nawur, Sariab, Khwaja Umri districts 7,000 people could not cast their votes due to lack of ballot papers. Hazaras constitute 60% of the population of Qarabagh district. Here the people were deprived of their right to vote and they had to return home after waiting up to 4 p.m. This pattern continued in the central Hazaristan (formerly called Hazarajat) provinces where thousands of people were unable to cast their votes. Now for Ghazni alone a media campaign of re-election has been launched. President Hamid Karzai is pressurizing the election commission, so that the victory of the Hazara candidates can be turned into defeat. Any such effort could push Afghanistan into social and political instability. It is a bitter fact that in order to ensure the indefinite domination and power of one linguistic group and to ensure the representation of the suppressed nationalities to bare minimum, the provinces and districts were constituted in such a way as to cause grave injustice and discrimination to

them, especially the number of provinces and districts in the Hazara majority areas were consciously brought to the possible minimum. As a result, one district of Hazaras has more population than two provinces of other nationalities. Besides this, while forming provinces in the Hazaristan, areas with a large population of Hazaras were merged with other provinces, so that the Hazaras can become a minority.

Since Hazara representation used to be almost none on government level, grave injustice was done to Hazaras as all government institutions made efforts to prove Hazaras as a small minority in official documents, in which they succeeded without any doubt. Therefore even today people are misled all over the world but the efforts of a renowned analyst like Rahimullah Yousafzai to hide glaring facts is beyond comprehension.

Besides this whole situation, if we have a cursory look at the history of Afghanistan, the fact unveils itself that a linguistic group, intoxicated by dominating and ruling the other nationalities, has taken conscious steps to keep them under subjugation. As for the Hazara nation is concerned, the historians can not dispute the fact that until mid-nineteenth century, Afghanistan comprised of various independent and sovereign states ruled by the respective nationalities. Herat, Kabul, Qandahar, Qunduz were all ruled by their respective rulers. Similarly the central highlands of Afghanistan, Hazaristan were ruled by local Khans. At the end of nineteenth century when the British felt the danger of Russian influence, it called Amir Abdur Rehman who at the time was in Tashkent and made him the ruler of Afghanistan, who in turn killed thousands of Hazaras in Hazaristan and annexed the state and merged it with Afghanistan. In order to prolong their rule and ensure their supremacy, these imported rulers adopted a policy to make sure their own tribe and linguistic group remained at the top and the subjugated nationalities had to live a life of deprivation. They snatched from the Turk Mongol Hazaras their freedom, their state and kept them under subjugation. The other nationalities, particularly the Hazaras who are predominantly Shias, were kept at a distance from the right to govern in all the constitutions of Afghanistan framed from time to time. For example, Article 8 of the constitution of Afghanistan laid down "The King of Afghanistan would be a person who has Afghani nationality, is a Muslim and belongs to the Hanafi sect." It is a fact that during these times neither the Charter of the United Nations was kept in view nor any effort made for equality and brotherhood among various peoples of Afghanistan. As a result, the representation of the other nationalities in the government came to almost zero, particularly the Hazara people were kept in the extreme of backwardness. During the 40 year rule of Zahir Shah not a single developmental work was undertaken in Hazaristan. During 1880-1901 the Hazaras were officially declared as non-Muslims and over 60% of their population was either killed mercilessly or forced to leave their fertile lands, which were ultimately distributed among Pashtun tribes. Besides, the sale and purchase of Hazara slaves was legalized. Later the grandson of this Amir, Shah Amanullah (1919-1929) abolished the practice through a decree. However Hazaras remained third class citizens politically, socially, ethnically, linguistically and from a religious standpoint until 1978.

In April 1978 the pro-Moscow government raised the slogan of "equality and brotherhood" which appealed to the Hazaras more than other nationalities but due to the chauvinistic policies of Hafeezullah Amin, this friendliness turned first into frustration

and then into hatred among Hazaras. Moving forward, the policies of Babrak Karmal and Dr. Najibullah which were relatively more realistic and the neglect adopted by the Jehadi groups in Peshawar (Pakistan), the Hazaras living in urban areas of Afghanistan under the control of the government, came closer to the government resulting in better education for the Hazara youth.

Taliban, with their inception in March 1995, called the well known Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari for dialogue deceitfully and murdered him brutally. This amounted to declaration of the policy of enmity against the Hazaras, which manifested itself later before the world in the organized genocide of thousands of Hazaras in the city of Mazar-e Sharif. According to the Human Rights Watch, the then Governor Mulla Niazi announced openly on many occasions “Hazaras should adopt the Sunni sect, leave the country or be ready to for mass murder.” The Taliban’s enmity towards Hazaras can be proved by the fact that the Taliban destroyed the two great Bamian Buddha statues, the 53 meters high ‘Salsal’ and 34 meters high ‘Shamama’ dating 1st and 2nd centuries respectively, on orders of Mulla Umer, using 125 mounds (500,000 kilogram) of dynamite. These statues deserved to have been included in the world heritage. The world could have looked the other way if the 9/11 attack did not happen. After the incident, a dramatic change happened in Afghanistan when the United States accused the terrorists in Afghanistan for the incident. As a result of the American attack on Afghanistan, the Taliban government dissolved in just 38 days. Later all the ethnic groups including the anti Taliban elements were gathered in Bonn, Germany under the auspices of the United Nations where for the first time the Hazara were accepted as one of the four main ethnic groups of the country and their representation in national affairs was accepted to the extent of 19%. In spite of this, the Hazaras were kept away from the presidency and key ministries of defense, interior and foreign affairs under pressure from powerful internal elements. The Loya Jirga convened in June 2002 in Kabul only gave 10% ministerial seats to Hazaras thus denying the 19% representation rights as accorded to them by the United Nations. Although during the first presidential run of Karzai government a few ministerial positions were given to Hazaras, the current setup gave no seats to Hazaras –one of the large ethnic groups in Afghanistan. This, thanks in part to the complex parliamentary procedures together with an ethnic bias that even qualified Hazara representatives were not found suitable enough for a position.

The recent parliamentary elections in Afghanistan are encouraging to Hazaras but this people, who have remained under subjugation for centuries are still subjected to internal and external discrimination. The idea of re-election in only one province of Afghanistan, Ghazni, amounts to encouraging the ethnic and linguistic disharmony among different nationalities of Afghanistan and exposes the dictatorial and autocratic mentality. The drama launched by the Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and the Pakistani and Afghani media aiming at making the recent elections doubtful, is not in favor of the country in any way. If the bitter past traditions are repeated once again, Afghanistan is likely to face grave instability and social unrest. The need of the day is to implement the Bonn Agreement in its real spirit in terms of the changes brought about in the country and the decisions taken for the development of the country. For a democratic and strong Afghanistan, it is imperative to ensure the representation of all the ethnic groups. If the

suppressed peoples of Afghanistan and the deprived ethnic groups are again excluded from all national affairs and thereby any effort made to run the country, the already war stricken country can actually divide. The only solution to the problem of Afghanistan is providing to each ethnic group representation in political affairs according to its actual population. For political, social and geographic stability of Afghanistan the universal principle of one man one vote has become a necessity.