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Preface

Although the peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban in Qatar have raised hopes for peace and security and in Afghanistan, but obstacles facing intra-Afghan concord have challenged the process.

Regarding the intra-Afghan concurrence, both sides have different viewpoints. The government was the Taliban to join the government alike Hezb-e-Islami did. However, the Taliban do not officially recognize the government and emphasizes on talks with Afghan politicians. Recently, there was a chance for conducting talks between the Taliban and Afghan government, which was unfortunately lost due to some existing obstacles.

The first part of CSRS weekly analysis discusses the causes of the postponement of Qatar meeting and the fate of Intra-Afghan concord.

The second part of the analysis has a discussion about the Kankor Exam in Afghanistan. Kankor exam is the only way enrollment in public universities. It is a destining exam through which school graduates of the country enter the stage of higher education in public universities. While efforts have been made for the transparency of the exam, but in some provinces, obstacles have still been witnessed in the process.

The postponement of Qatar meeting and the fate of intra-Afghan Concord



An important meeting for intra-Afghan concurrence was scheduled to be conducted on 20th and 21st of April, 2019, in the Doha. However, the disagreements among the participants led to the postponement of the meeting.

The Afghan government published a list of 250 participants of the meeting, which was immediately criticized by the Taliban through a proclamation and considered it an obstacle for the process. The director of organizing institution announced the postponement of the meeting on his Twitter, two days before the meeting.

The Taliban published a proclamation and held the Afghan government responsible for the delay. However, the government says that the meeting was postponed by the government of Qatar. A proclamation of the presidential palace said “As the government of Qatar was unable to meet our legitimate demands, therefore cancelled the meeting”.

Here, we discuss the planned intra-Afghan meeting in Qatar, causes of its postponement and the direction towards which the intra-Afghan concord is headed.

The Intra-Afghan negotiations in Qatar

A few months ago on 16th and 17th of Dalwa, 1397 [solar], the Taliban representatives and some Afghan politicians, Jihadi leaders, and former government officials including Hamid Karzai, ex-president of Afghanistan met for the first time in Moscow. It was an exceptional two-day meeting which ended with a joint proclamation.

Although the unity government did not participate in the Moscow meeting and strictly criticized it, but the meeting still increased hopes for the commencement of intra-Afghan talks.

According to the agreement of Moscow summit, the second meeting was planned to be conducted in Doha of Qatar. Thus, various bodies, especially Zalmay Khalilzad, special representative of U.S. for Afghanistan begun struggles so that representatives of Afghan government can also participate in the meeting.

As the Afghan government agreed to allow participation of their representatives, it was a valuable step towards the success of the process. Unfortunately, different obstacles led to the postponement of the meeting.

Why the Qatar meeting got delayed?

The postponement of Qatar meeting is due to hostile viewpoints of the Taliban and the Afghan government against each other, since both sides strive to express their supremacy in negotiations. The Taliban perceive that they are on the positive side of the war due to their talks with the United States. Therefore, according to the, the process should continue in accordance with their choice. On the other hand, the Afghan government, who have participated in negotiations due to pressure, are does not want the process to flow against their will.

The list of 250 individuals which was published by the government without informing the organizer is a main cause of delay due to several reasons. Firstly, since only 25 representatives of the Taliban were going to participate in the meeting, the announcement of a large number of participants was intolerable for the Taliban and the organizer of the meeting. In addition, there were individuals included in the list who have hostile standpoints regarding the peace process and it was perceived that the meeting will not have favorable results.

The published list of 250 individuals by the Afghan government expresses lack of trust on the government's side. It was apparently presumed that the meeting is going to be conducted to distribute power and authority. Thus, each side needs to have greater role in it. Conversely, the purpose of the meeting was to share views and ideas regarding peace. Participation of a large number of individuals would have made this purpose difficult to achieve.

Since the flexibility in government's standpoint and their participation in the Qatar meeting was a result of pressures, therefore the concerns were that government's delegates will create obstacles and at the same time fulfill their responsibility.

The fate of the intra-Afghan concord

The unity government pressured the Taliban more than Hamid Karzai for face-to-face negotiation. However, their efforts confronted failure since the Taliban always stressed on negotiation with the United States.

The commencement of Qatar process eliminated the cessation of intra-Afghan talks and the process entered to a serious stage. The five meetings between the U.S. and the Taliban representatives and their partial agreement over the pullout was hopeful. However, the hostile standpoint of Afghan government has greatly challenged the Qatar process.

The Qatar process begins in a period when preparations are being done for Afghan presidential elections and president Ghani is among the nominated candidates. The government seemingly prioritizes the elections, because according to the plan of the president, peace treaty with the Taliban should be signed after the elections and should at least take five years. This was the reason why the Afghan president openly opposed negotiations previously.

Since the unity government wants the peace process to be government-centered and the Taliban, on the other hand, consider themselves the victors of the war due to their negotiations with the United States and thus want the process to continue according to their choices. The fate of intra-Afghan concord is therefore, still unknown.

Suggestions

The following steps are necessary for a change on the intra-Afghan agreement:

- The decision of U.S. president regarding the foreign forces pullout should be considered as an opportunity for peace and security. The occasion should end the war in Afghanistan and should not be used for personal and partisan advantages. If some entities and individuals want to take advantage of the opportunity for their personal interests and interests of a party, his actions will be considered treason in the history of our country.
- Lack of trust between the Taliban and Afghan government is a great obstacle for the intra-Afghan concord. Thus, reduction in trust issues is greatly required. The efforts of Afghan politicians can be effective for resolving the issue. Thus, the Afghan government and the Taliban should assist their efforts in order to have effective results. Particularly, harmony between Afghan politicians and the government is seriously needed.
- Under the name of “Authority of Afghans”, the government struggles to take the process under control, which has led to ineffectiveness of the efforts for intra-Afghan consensus. Consequently, less actions have been taken for the reduction in lack of trust issues between the Taliban and the government. So, the slogan should not lead to the uselessness of efforts by the Afghan side.
- Another obstacle for the intra-Afghan concord is that both sides do not officially recognize each other. The Afghan government identifies the Taliban as a terrorist group and The Taliban consider the Afghan government as a weak and subjugated entity. In order to resolve this issue, the Taliban representatives, Afghan politicians and government’s delegates should negotiate so that their viewpoints can turn into a national stand and the hostility can be reduced among the sides.
- In addition, the Taliban and the Afghan government should avoid inappropriate statements, negative publicities, useless pressures and accusations, in order to witness reduction in trust issues.
- The Afghan nation who are the main victims of the war, also has a vital responsibility. Afghans should not only avoid creating obstacles for the peace process, but need to have a role in creating an environment of trust and healthy pressures.
- For now, a new intra-Afghan meeting should be arranged after the failure of the Qatar meeting, so that the process doesn’t face dead end and the hopes and expectations do not turn into despair.

End

Kankor; An exam to reach higher education in Afghanistan



The process of taking Kankor exams of 1397-1398 [solar] started around a month ago, aiming to absorb high school graduates in higher education institutions. Thus far, the exam has been taken in 12 provinces.

As a part of the process, Kankor exam was taken in Balkh province a few days ago, where 14914 individuals, including boys and girls, participated in the exam. Although the process was transparent and well-planned compared to the last few years, but some technical issues, poor implementation of mechanisms, and corruption are among the issues which still challenges the process.

Methods of reaching higher education in Afghanistan, The Kankor process, challenges for the process and their solutions are among the issues that are discussed here.

Reaching higher education in Afghanistan

The first higher education institution founded in Afghanistan was Kabul faculty of medical sciences which was established on 1st of Aqrab, 1311. The faculty began its work under the directorship of Turkish scholar Dr. Rafiqi Kamil Baig and eight other lecturers.

In 1325, the first university was established under the name of “Kabul University” in Afghanistan. Despite ups and downs, war and insecurity for more than 3 decades, the

higher education sector has developed remarkably. Currently, around 38 public, and 131 private universities are operating and producing graduates all around the country.

After completion of twelve years of school, Succeeding in Kankor exam is the only way of enrollment in public higher education institutions. Considering the capacity of public institutions, Kankor is the hardest competition for individuals who want to reach higher education.

Although the higher education sector developed remarkably and the number of public higher education institutions increased after the establishment of new regime in 2001, but considering the demand of Afghan society, the government is facing obstacles and is unable to enroll all secondary school graduates in higher education institutions.

In addition, the Kankor process has also witnessed corruption alike other sectors during last 18 years. Poor mechanism, corruption in Kankor committee, unstandardized questions, interference of authorities and government officials and counterfeits are among the issues due to which, the transparency of the exam has been questioned and many talented individuals have been deprived from reaching their favorite faculties every year.

Although with the commencement of unity government, remarkable steps were taken for transparency in Kankor exam, biometric system was introduced to the Kankor process and interferences lessened, but there still are issues which requires serious attention.

Current process of the Kankor exam

Efforts for transparency in Kankor exam is one of the achievements of the unity government. In year 1395, the government, with the financial assistance of global development project of United States, activated the biometric system for Kankor applicant identification.

According to the system, participants are perform biometric check two times; before the exam and on the day of the exam. The system was able to prevent those individuals who set for exam in exchange for others. Earlier when the biometric system was not introduced, the number of substitutes and counterfeits was high, which was a cause of injustice in the process.

Question bank is another important aspect of the Kankor process. Previously, ministry of higher education did not have a prosperous question bank and sometimes for some provinces, only one question book was prepared, which was a cause of misuses and counterfeits in Kankor exams. However, with the implementation of new Kankor system, the question bank of the Kankor committee enriched currently has around 60 thousand questions.

Another issue regarding the new Kankor system is that only one question book and ID is prepared for an applicant, which is different from the question book of other applicants. Thus, cheating has almost been eliminated and applicants are forced to solve questions themselves. Counterfeits and interferences have also been reduced in Kankor process.

In addition, the period/session of taking Kankor exams has also been reformed. Previously, Due to incapability of ministry of higher education, Kakor exams were taken before final exams in some cold provinces. Now however, the session has been changed (exams will start at the beginning of a solar year and end in Jawza of the same year) and participants of Kankor are able to participate in exams and can join universities mid-year.

Although the Kankor process has been standardized and transparent, but there still are problems which require resolution.

Existing problems in the Kankor process.

- **Corruption:** Although interferences of corrupt individuals have reduced after biometric system, but findings of center for strategic and regional studies indicate that corruption in Kankor process has not been eliminated completely. For instance, some commissioners during the Kankor exams in Balkh last week, requested students to pledge 4000-5000 USD, and the amount will be transferred to commissioners in return for success into faculty of medicine.

In addition, poor management by the Kankor committee has led to exploitations by some local supervisors and controllers. It has been reported that some lecturers who participates in exam as supervisors are involved in cheating and have assisted a specific applicants linked to them. This issue has led to injustice and unfairness.

- **Poor management:** Although the Kankor committee of ministry of higher education has made the Kankor system more transparent, but still lacks individuals who can assist in the implementation of the system. Some delegates

and lecturers who are sent to supervise the exam are either unable to implement the mechanism, instruct applicants and supervise and monitor the exam, or they are lazy enough to act irresponsibly. Due to absence of clear instructions, applicants make mistakes in understanding the exam and faculties' selection, which later, leads to their regret and sorrow.

It is necessary for ministry of higher education to send capable and responsible individuals to monitor the exams.

- Unstandardized Kankor questions: poor standards of Kanor questions is another issue facing the Kankor process. For instance, science questions were included in the Kankor exam of balkh for graduates of religious schools, while modern sciences are only taught in 9th grade of religious schools. It is necessary for the exam committee to pay attention to differences in general and Islamic education while preparing exam questions.
- Printing problems: print and font type of exam question books are another problem which cause trouble in understanding the context. Even when a lecturer is present in the exam center, but that lecturer has only specialized in a solitary field, not in all fields. Thus, it is necessary to use either Dari or Pashto fonts in exam question books. In addition, it is necessary to carefully print question books and avoid spelling mistakes, so that problems for applicants in exams can be avoided.

End

Contact Us:

Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.com

Website: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.net

Office: **(+93) 202564049 - (+93) 784089590**



Researcher and Editor of Weekly Analysis: **Zia-ul-Islam Shirani**

Researcher and Distributor of Weekly Analysis: **Ahmad Shah Rashed**