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Preface

“Peace” is a term that Afghans have heard more than any other word in the past one and a half decade, yet in practice they witness bloodshed and war on a daily basis. Besides the Afghan government and some other countries, many NGOs and individuals are making efforts to achieve peace in Afghanistan. Some news were disseminated about a possible meeting of the officials of Afghan High Peace Council and the Taliban in one of the Gulf countries, this process was led by an NGO but is postponed now.

Due to fundamental issues in the peace strategies, the Afghan government’s efforts for peace have failed in the past one and a half decade and still the Afghan government’s policy is to achieve peace through the war, which is very much arguable whether or not it is a proper policy. In the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), you would read an assessment of the National Unity Government’s Peace Policy.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the issue of reviewing the higher education curriculum in the country. The acting Afghan Minister of Higher Education, who resigned several days ago, said in the inauguration ceremony of reviewing the curriculum that the ministry was committed to renew and standardize the curriculum and that the new curriculum would be implemented in the universities next year. Although this move is a very appropriate move, the execution plan of reviewing the curriculum consists many problems. What needs to be done to properly execute this plan is an issue analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

In the last part of the analysis, you would read about CSRS’s initiative, to convening a conference to analyze the current impasse in the peace process and solutions, to be launched next week.

The Peace Process: negotiations to start the negotiations



Talks between the Afghan politicians and civil activists on the one side and the members of the Taliban's political office on the other side was to be held in early November in Dubai; however, the non-governmental organization of Afghanistan's Peace Studies, the organizer of the process, has said that such negotiations in Dubai are delayed for the time.

Although the reasons behind the postponement of the negotiations are not clear yet, based on the statement of the organizer institution, this conference was not aimed at bringing the Afghan High Peace Council and the Taliban members around the one table.

Before this, some international organizations have facilitated the conventions of such gatherings in Japan, Germany, France, and some other countries, but none have produced any result.

A glimpse into the NUG's peace policy

Since the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), ending the Afghan war, strengthening the Afghan forces, and achieving peace were the primary elements of the country's foreign policy. As an effort to achieve peace, the Afghan President began his travels from China, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan and, to attract Pakistan's attention to the peace process, gave many privileges to this country. Hence, Kabul mostly relied on Pakistan for its peace process. The Afghanistan-Pakistan-China trilateral meetings also commenced; its results being one of the Urumqi talks. In these talks efforts were made to include the Taliban in these talks because those who had participated in the Urumqi talks on behalf of the Taliban could not properly represent them.

In all the process of peace reconciliation with the Taliban, only the Murree talks were, somehow, a success for the NUG; however, due to the disclosure of the death of the Taliban leader Mula Mohammad Omar, this success did not take root. Later-on, the Quadrilateral Meetings between Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, and the US began; nevertheless, due to the Taliban's denial to participate in these talks, these meetings also failed to open the way for the face to face talks with the Taliban. The two primary reasons behind the failure of this process was inviting the Taliban through Pakistan instead of properly inviting them and the announcement of the policy of taking actions against the Taliban if they did not take part in these negotiations. Although Pakistan accepted this policy in the Quadrilateral Meetings, it did nothing later.

The peace process must not be the victim of incidents!

Unfortunately, the past history proves that whenever there was a slight progress in the peace process, it has immediately become the victim of bloody incidents. In nowhere around the world, wars have stopped during the peace process but rather after the peace agreements. If the Afghan Taliban stop their war against the Afghan government and join the peace process, it would mean that the Afghan government also has to stop their fight against the Taliban and let them do what they wish wherever they want.

In the meanwhile, the Afghan Taliban must also realize the situation and, despite the Afghan government's war strategy and the new US policy towards South Asia and Afghanistan, prepare themselves to join the peace process. For instance, during the long-lasting war of Vietnam, the war was continuing between the US and Ho Chi Minh forces and simultaneously peace talks were also going on, and at the end, the US forces withdrew from Vietnam after the Paris peace agreement.

Is the peace process really the process of peace?

Last month (October), the US war in Afghanistan entered its 16th year. This war was not only the longest war in the US history but also it was an unprecedentedly long war on behalf of the foreigners in the past 300 years of the Afghan history.

Although forming the peace-maintenance commission, the Afghan government officially started its peace efforts in 2005, 12 years since then, still the Afghan government's progress in the peace process is equal to zero.

Still the Afghan government's greatest wish is to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table that is why we say that this is not a peace process but rather the Afghan government's effort to, somehow, bring the Taliban to the negotiation table.

It is really surprising that instead of seeking results through undertaking proper policies and building the bridges of trust, the Afghan government has mainly focused on forcing the Taliban to join the peace process.

Even after Trump's current policy towards South Asia and Afghanistan, the Afghan government must keep the peace process running and should not merely focus on the US policy because the past experiences show that it is impossible to achieve peace only through the war. Therefore, at a time that the US hegemony is declining in the region and the world, the number of US troops in Afghanistan has decreased, and the Taliban are stronger than ever in areas of both diplomacy and the war, the Afghan government must not stop the peace process.

National consensus over the curriculum and the situation of higher educations in Afghanistan



In order to improve and standardize the higher education in the country, with the instruction of President Ghani, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education has undertaken the program of national consensus of reviewing the curriculum of higher education.

The current curriculum of the universities has always been criticized for being substandard and outdated. The Afghan President has always criticized the situation and system of education in Afghan universities and has reiterated on reviewing and changing the current curriculum. He says that the higher education institutions have failed to produce professional and expert work force for the government organizations.

It comes at a time that the National Committee of Review and Development of Curriculum was established in the Ministry of Higher Educations in 2009. In 2013 this committee distributed a new curriculum to the universities and higher education universities. However, even this curriculum was not standardized and updated and it did not get implemented properly. After that, no initiative has been undertaken to revise and bring reforms to the curriculum of higher educations.

Here you would read about the current status of higher education in the country, national consensus of curriculum of the universities, and the need to change the current curriculum.

The situation of higher education

Since 1976 [1355 solar year], the year which in the Ministry of Higher Education was founded in Afghanistan, till 2001 and the formation of the new government in the country, the higher educations have experienced many ups and downs. After 2002, the state of higher education began to improve in quantity and besides the government institutions, many private universities also offered higher educations for Afghan students. Currently, about 32 government institutions and 130 private institutions are active in areas of higher education in the country. Nevertheless, despite the expenditure of billions of dollars over the past one and a half decade, the qualitative capacity of higher education is still a major challenge in areas of higher education in Afghanistan.

In this regard the followings are noteworthy:

- Lack of a national strategy for education;
- Poor management in higher education;
- The current curriculum is not updated and does not meet the needs of the country;
- Lack of coordination in accepting students in various faculties based on the demands of the market.
- Lack of educational tools in the higher education institutions;
- Weak monitoring in the universities;
- Lack of professional and academic full-time cadres;
- Lack of scientific researches and infrastructures for debates and scientific researches.

The challenges mentioned above and some other issues have led not only to the submission of obsolete work force to the bazaar but also in most cases the fate of the youth has become a serious issue of the society.

National Consensus of curriculum

Given the serious need for a standardized curriculum for universities, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education has decided to take some steps to this end. The process of National Consensus of Curriculum, Review, and Standardization (NCCRS) is an initiative of the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education which will review the current curriculum and prepare it in accordance with the needs of Bazar.

Based on the remarks of the officials in the Ministry of Higher Education, the discussions of the experts of national consensus of the curriculum will be around the six following points:

1. The review and the structure of current educational departments and faculties in the universities;
2. Evaluation and review of the curriculum and updating it and making it based on the needs of employment market and making it an equivalent of the education systems of other countries in the world;
3. The implementation of credit system in all universities;
4. Introduction of new methods of teaching;
5. Increasing the role of research in universities;
6. Evaluation of the resources and academic developments of the professors.

Although the review of the curriculum is an important event in areas of higher education, there seems to be some challenges on its way that may led to the implementation of only a propaganda conference and such schemes may remain on the papers.

In the meanwhile, the time that the Ministry of Higher educations has given to renew and standardize the curriculum is not a sufficient time. If the Ministry of higher education brought the necessary changes even in several years, that would be a success.

The main issue of the universities and the higher education institutions in the country are lack of profession and academic cadres and educational tools, and low level of education of the graduates of the secondary educations. The officials in the Ministry of Higher Education also accept that there are circles that have filled the positions as professors in the universities who do not let the educated stratum to be appointed as lecturers in the institutions of higher education.

Therefore, even if the Ministry of Higher Education succeeded in standardizing the curriculum, with the presence of professors whose 50% only hold a bachelor degree, it would be very difficult to implement such a curriculum. Moreover, poor management in the Ministry of Higher Education and weak monitoring administrations to oversee the implementation process of a standardized curriculum are other challenges in this regard.

Overall, given the efforts that the Ministry has undertaken and the execution plan of this process, which the researchers in CSRS have accessed, this process seems rather a propaganda move and this strategic issue is not treated the way it deserves to be treated.

There is a need to change the system of higher education but how?

Although the country fiercely needs the development of a curriculum based on the present situations in the country and worldly standards, how can such a system be developed? In this regard the following points are noteworthy:

1. The Ministry of Higher Education needs to, first, reform its management system and second, to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses all the existing challenges in the higher education institutions in the country.
2. Efforts must be undertaken to improve the quality of the secondary educations which are the bases of the higher education. Moreover, the relevant ministry should also undertake a system that enables the universities to accept students based on the needs of the Bazar.
3. Currently, the research bodies in the Afghan universities does not exist or are very weak and since these bodies are key elements in improving the

quality of education, investments must be made in this area and the research and scientific infrastructures must be constructed.

4. Urging the lecturers to write academic debates. It means that instead of promoting lecturers after writing books, the Ministry of Higher Education must develop a system that necessitates the writing exact scientific debates for lecturers to be promoted.
5. Education tools are also in integrated part of the education. Therefore, the relevant Ministry must build equipped libraries in universities and other higher education institutions. Moreover, the way for students to access online libraries and information centers around the world must be paved.
6. In order to achieve and implement the issues mentioned above, it is clear that sufficient budget is required. Therefore, the budget allocated to the Higher Educations must be increased.

Conclusion

A qualified higher education may led to developing the employment opportunities based on the employment market as well as the improvement of the quality of higher education in the country. But achieving this end will not be possible only by sketching schemes on the paper and organizing fabulous gatherings and stating statements.

The current initiative of the Ministry of Higher education is a good step towards improving the quality of education in the country but the ministry's execution plan seems to consist many problems.

Overall, the Ministry of Higher Education is faced with lack of an exact and efficient strategy in system of both its management and the higher education. Therefore, the main issue is the implementation of the scheme and it will only be resolved through brining fundamental changes in the Ministry and the system of higher educations.

Moreover, in the midst of all this, the acting Minister of Higher Education has resigned which is a noteworthy issue in the current circumstances.

Upcoming Conference: the current stalemate of the peace process and the way forward



The conference under “The Current Stalemate of the peace process in Afghanistan and the way forward” is to be convened in Kabul next week.

In this conference which will be organized on behalf of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), the relevant government officials and the active personalities in areas of peace will talk about the current impasse in the peace process and the ways out of it.

Although besides the Afghan government, many other parties are making efforts to break through the current deadlock in the peace process, it seems that these efforts have gotten no one nowhere and disappointments in this regard are growing. Therefore, CSRS is undertaking this initiative to assess the issue and find possible practical solutions.

The End

Contact Us:

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

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

Office: (+93) 784089590

Contact with Officials:

Dr. AbdulBaqi Amin, General Director of CSRS: (+93) 789316120 abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com

Hekmatullah Zaland, Senior Manager: (+93) 775454048 hekmat.zaland@gmail.com

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