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Preface

While the Afghan Independent Elections Commission (IEC) have announced that presidential elections day would be on the 21 March 2019, the fate of the October parliamentary and district council elections remains in a quandary. Although the government, political parties, and IEC held five meetings on the upcoming elections; the concerns of the political parties regarding the transparency of the upcoming elections as well as security challenges have not been laid to rest.

The date for Presidential Election day was announced by the IEC after a number of politicians challenged the ongoing electoral process and asked the government to cancel the process. Additionally, rumors that the National Unity Government (NUG) seeks to extend its current period have added to the Afghan President's decision to ask the Elections Commission to announce the date for Presidential Election Day. Hence, the first part of the Weekly Analysis of Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) discusses how possible and practical the upcoming year's elections are, and what problems and challenges lay ahead.

The recent Kankor examination (university admission exam) is discussed in the second part of the Analysis. Last week, the results for 2017-2018 Kankor exam was announced, according to which 61000 students out of a total of 160,000 students were granted admission in higher education institutions. The second part of the Analysis looks into how the recent Kankor exam was taken, the overall situation of higher education in Afghanistan, and what improvements are necessary in this vital sector.

2019 Presidential Elections and Challenges Ahead



The Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the date set for the upcoming presidential elections which they decided would be held on 20 April 2019. Dr. Abdul Badi Sayyad, head of IEC told a press conference that the given date for the presidential elections was chosen based on the country's constitution and the law on elections, considering the various operational, financial, administrative, security and climate conditions of the country, and as a result of consultations with the representatives of political parties, civil society activists and electoral overseeing institutions.

The announcement of the presidential election's date comes at a time when there remains much perplexity and uncertainty with regards to the parliamentary elections which have been postponed for three years. Although the parliamentary elections is set to take place on the 20 October 2018, the existence of security threats, opposition of political parties and accusations of fraud and imitation adds to the ambivalence of the situation.

In this Analysis, we look at the 2019 presidential elections, the challenges ahead, and the fate of the National Unity Government.

Presidential Elections

Based on [Article 61](#) of the Afghan Constitution, the President shall be elected by receiving more than fifty percent of votes cast by voters through free, general, private and direct voting. The presidential term shall expire on 1st of third month of the fifth year after elections. Elections for the new president shall be held within thirty to sixty days prior to the end of the presidential term.

The term of the National Unity Government (NUG), which was formed after the controversial 2014 presidential elections, will, according to its contract and based on the constitution, officially expire on the 1st of Jawza (3rd month) of 1398 (solar year) after which a new President will be elected to take up office.

President Ghani has time and again stressed that the Presidential Election would be held on the time specified in the Afghan Constitution. Recently, during the Fifth National Women Symposium, the President once again stressed that his term would expire by the 1st of Jawza of 1398 (solar year) and thus termed the [holding](#) of presidential elections in accordance with the Afghan Constitution as indispensable.

Although for a long time the President had also emphasized the importance of holding parliamentary elections, the Afghan people have witnessed three years of its postponement. Finally, the Afghan government was able to announce 20 October 2018 as the date for the parliamentary elections. The practical work of the process has started but its fate is yet to be spelled out due to the existence of security threats, political disputes between political parties and the government, criticism of the mechanism of holding elections, corruption, and fraud in the process.

Will the Presidential Elections be Held?

The Afghan Independent Elections Commission (IEC) specified the date for holding the presidential elections and the government also welcomed it while it faces grim circumstances of the security, political and economic situation. The question is whether the government will be able to hold the presidential elections in a period of less than one year, in accordance with the constitution and the time frame, considering that the fate of the parliamentary elections is not palpable yet.

The following points indicate that holding the 2019 presidential elections on 19 March, 2019 is not practically possible:

Security Dilemma: Insecurity is one of the biggest challenges threatening the upcoming presidential elections. According to SIGAR, 42% of Afghan territory is either controlled or influenced by the armed opposition of the Afghan government. The security threats by ISIS (Daesh) have increased after the National Unity Government (NUG) came into power, and especially in the last two years. The group has frequently targeted public and civilian bodies like schools and mosques with their bloody attacks in the last few months despite the presence of military organs. More than 120 people have been killed in the latest attack of the group on a [mosque](#) in Paktia.

Budget: Although a specific budget is yet to be allocated for the upcoming Presidential Elections as the IEC acknowledges, while declaring the official date for holding the Presidential Elections, Abdul Badi Sayyad, head of IEC, said that the IEC would require the cooperation of the international community and the government when it comes to funding the election budget.

The Afghan government has promised to facilitate the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) entirely. Additionally, donor countries have promised that they would provide the expenditure of the elections while emphasizing they should be given assurance that the money is not misused. Currently, Afghanistan faces

numerous problems as corruption remains one of the main challenges for the Afghan government.

Fate of the Parliamentary Election: The unfolding of the process leading to parliamentary elections would directly impact public perception on the presidential elections. Presently, the political parties accuse the government of meddling in the work of the commission and do not accept the current mechanism for holding the elections either. Thus, it would be safe to predict that if the IEC is not able to hold the parliamentary election on the date specified, and without confrontations, it would seem most likely that the commission would not be able to hold the presidential elections either.

Conclusion

Looking at the 2014 presidential elections and the long-lasting disputes that were held after a delay of four months, the 3-year postponement of the upcoming parliamentary elections, along with a dragging implementation process, points to the likelihood of the upcoming presidential elections not being held at the set date.

The recent confrontations between a number of political parties and the Afghan government have caused in deterioration in the political situation of the country. Political parties want change in the electoral system, cancellation of the voting registration process and use of the biometric method for voters' registration. If this situation continues, the government will have to accept the demands of the parties, and holding the elections on the announced date will not be possible.

On the other hand, the topic of peace talks with the Taliban is considered a decisive factor in the holding of the upcoming presidential elections. Should the peace talks with the Taliban further progress, there is high possibility that the upcoming presidential elections will not be held on the date specified by the IEC, and the term of the National Unity Government (NUG) then would be extended until the peace talks with the Taliban are concluded. If the peace talks have any

positive results, it is possible an interim government would be announced and the efforts on rescheduling the elections would be made until the presidential elections are held.

Overall, if the presidential elections are to be held in the current dire security and political circumstances, it is most likely that the experience of the 2014 presidential elections would be repeated in Afghanistan, and the country would enter another serious crisis. End

Nevertheless, these students are eligible for admission into private and public semi-higher education institutions.

Previously some reports had emerged highlighting the occurrence of some fraudulent activity in Kankor exams in previous years, however, after the National Unity Government (NUG) came to power, it took some measures in order to ensure transparency of the exam leading to improvement in the credibility of the exam. Nonetheless, the higher education institutions face numerous complications in general.

The situation of Afghan higher education institutions and their challenges and opportunities are discussed here.

Kankor: Towards Transparency

Kankor Exam has remained the only admission exam to public universities in Afghanistan for many years. Students in the 12th grade graduate and via Kankor exams attain admission in public universities in order to pursue their higher education.

Similar to other public sector bodies, Kankor was also tainted by corruption in the last 17 years. Corruption in the Kankor Examination Committee, lack of compliance of exam questions with academic standards, intervention of strongmen and some government officials in the process, entering exam as a substitute, and other fraudulent cases are what drove people's concerns over the transparency of the Kankor Process.

Transparency in the Kankor exam and prevention of corruption in the process are considered an important achievement of the National Unity Government (NUG) after it took power. NUG made use of high-tech machines in exams in order to prevent corruption in the Kankor of the Ministry of Higher Education. The system, unlike the previous one that provided every student with similar questions, contains unique questions for every student as it prints their paper out, prepares it and writes the name of the student down on it.

We cannot say the corruption hits zero in the process either, however, through the use of new technology, the exam is now transparent in comparison to the

past as copying, substituting and leaking of questions before exam were very rife. This has made the people trust its transparency more than ever.

Situation of Universities in Afghanistan

86 years ago, the very first higher education institution (Kabul Medical University) was founded in 1932. Development in the field of higher education was stagnant until 2001. Before that, war and instability had created a standstill in development; however, after the new system was established in 2001, remarkable progress has been made in this field.

The Afghan higher education system improved in quantity due to the billion-dollar assistance of the international community and foreign countries. Besides public universities, tens of private higher education institutions started to operate in the country. For now, there are 32 public and 130 private higher education institutions in the country; however, considering the billions of dollars that have been spent by the international community in the last 17 years, the quality of Afghan higher education still lacks profusely.

Looking at the bigger picture, war and insecurity have impacted the higher education system as well, but on the other hand, lack of a well-thought strategy of the Afghan government with regards to higher education, mismanagement of the Ministry of Higher Education, out datedness of the curriculum, lack of its compliance with modern needs, corruption, weak monitoring in the higher education institutions, lack of professional academic cadres, lack of attention to research in universities etc. are problems that have lowered the quality of higher education to a large extent.

The reasons mentioned before and other similar problems have made university-graduated students a burden to the society. With scarce employment opportunities and a growing educated work-force, frustrated youth become an additional challenge to the many challenges already facing Afghanistan.

What the higher education system needs in Afghanistan?

Students pursue Higher education for the purpose of better opportunities and a successful future. In terms of progress, higher education is generally believed to be a key to achievement in life. The more standardized the higher education system is, the more positive outcomes for students in the system. Afghanistan's higher education system lacks and is in dire need of such a standardized system.

The following points are noticeable in this regard:

- First and foremost, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education should bring needed reforms in its management system and make an orderly, comprehensive and applicable policy for the sake of solving the problems in the ministry, and based on that, bring gradual reforms in all fields.
- The basis for higher education is high school studies. And, in order to have eligible and capable students absorbed in universities, it is necessary to take care of the quality of school education and to seriously work on the capacity-building of the students there.
- Researches in higher education institutions have a very crucial role in the quality of education. Unfortunately, the Afghan higher education institutions have neglected this important field. It is necessary to work on this field in universities, to provide facilities for academic and research discussion, to conduct necessary and honest research, to reward professors with promotions in order to create incentives for research, and to benefit from the valuable source of knowledge for the development of Afghanistan.
- The existence of modern educational tools is an important and impactful aspect that directly influences the knowledge accumulation. The Ministry of Higher Education is required to equip universities and higher education institutions with digital libraries and also provide the students with the access to other important digital libraries through the internet.

- Adequate budget is also required to have the above-mentioned issues resolved and to empower the higher education sector as a whole. Thus, it is incumbent on the Afghan government to give utmost consideration to the research sector when it comes to budget allocation.

End

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