

Re-Visiting Tashqand as International Observer for Parliamentary Elections

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On 20th December 2019, I reached Tashqand city as part of International Observers delegation to observe the Parliamentary Elections to be held on 22 December 2019. The Parliamentary history of Independent Uzbekistan started in 1991-92 with Supreme Soviet as a transit parliament (1991 to 1994) which adopted the Constitution of Uzbekistan. In 1995 Uzbekistan's Unicameral Parliament the Oliy Majlis replaced the Supreme Soviet. Uzbekistan continued reforming the parliamentary system Oliy Majlis which became bi-cameral consisting of lower house i.e. Legislative Chamber and upper house the Senate in January 2005. More than seven hundred delegates from different countries around the world were invited to observe the Parliamentary Elections on 22nd December 2019 of the Republic of Uzbekistan. I had time to visit my alma mater i.e. Tashqand State Economic University from where I had earned my Master in Economics degree in 1996.

On 21st December I met with the Rector of Tashqand State Economic University Prof Dr. Sharipov Kongratbay Avezimbetovich. Lt. Col. Khalid Taimur was also present in the meeting. The Rector was glad to see one of his University's graduate as Professor. He informed that his University is going to develop Alumni Association where Prof Shabir Ahmad Khan will be on top of the list. He also invited me for lectures on different aspects and subjects of Uzbekistan, Pak-Uzbek Relations, Central Asia and Eurasia which I accepted as an honour. We agreed to devise a mechanism for this and long term future cooperation between Area Study Centre for Russia, China & Central Asia University of Peshawar, Peshawar Pakistan and Tashqand State Economic University Tashqand Uzbekistan. We agreed to move towards signing MoU for exchange of scholars/faculty and research material between the two institutions. I presented copies of Centre's research journal "Central Asia" to the Rector. After meeting we also

observed the polling station established at the University for the next day elections. On the same day afternoon we attended a conference organised for the five political parties contested the Parliamentary Elections where I met with Mr Mirza Ulegbek Abdussalamov Chairman Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan and members of Senate Upper House of the Uzbek Parliament. Beauty of the event was that most of the international observers from around the world were present to observe the debate amongst the representatives of five contesting political parties on Uzbek national social and economic issues, challenges and their agendas for national development. Uzbekistan is successfully copying and implanting best practices of the developed western democracies.

Next day on 22nd December I visited seven polling stations in different regions of Tashqand where excellent arrangements were made for citizens including a separate place for disable persons. The public came and calmly polled their votes in sealed transparent box. Many also brought children with themselves who enjoyed the scenes of polling at polling stations. I witnessed honourable Chairperson of Senate of Uzbekistan Tanzila Narbaeva came like an ordinary person and polled her vote. Later I had a meeting with the honourable Chairperson of Senate, introduced myself as a graduate of Tashqand University and now Professor in the University of Peshawar. She was delighted and expressed hope that Pakistan and Uzbekistan will have much closer political, economic and strategic relations in future. The discipline, organisation and transparency was exemplary during the polling and I thought alas we could also develop such discipline and organisation for elections in our country. By 8 pm polling stopped and the transparent boxes were emptied in our (International Observers) presence in front of political parties' representatives and counted votes in a transparent manner.

On 23rd December I had a meeting with Dr. Eldor Aripov Director Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies Under the President of Uzbekistan. General Rd. Khalid Jaffery President Centre for Global and Strategic Studies Islamabad (CGSS) and Lt. Col. Rd. Khalid Taimur Executive Director of the CGSS were also present. General Rd. Khalid Jaffery talked about rapidly developing Pak-Uzbek relations and suggested for enhanced cooperation between the think tanks of the two institutions. Lt. Col. Rd. Khalid

Taimur highlighted the achievements of CGSS in enhancing Pak-Uzbek contacts and organisation of various conferences on Pak-Uzbek political and economic relations. Both also emphasised increased Pak-Uzbek coordination on Afghan imbroglio as it is hindering regional integration. I introduced the Area Study Centre University of Peshawar, its mandate, functions and purpose and briefly highlighted its achievement since its inception in 1975. I also emphasised on close cooperation between the academic and research institutions of the two countries. I said that Pakistan always supported and advocated a regional approach for resolving Afghan issue and achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Dr. Elder Aripov accentuated on inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue as marginalising one section or the other would have negative implications in the long term, he added. Importantly the meeting ended with the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). I signed MoU with Mr. Eldor Aripov for the long term cooperation, exchange of scholars and research material between the Area Study Centre University of Peshawar and Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies Tashqand.

On 24th December I visited the Parliament of Uzbekistan Oliy Majlis where other observers from different countries were also present. I met with Mr. Ilkhom Abdullaev MP and Chairman of Parliamentary Committee on issues of innovation and development. We were briefed on the results of elections and were also shown the Museum developed inside the Parliament building and main hall/auditorium where MPs assemble for session. Same day afternoon I had a fruitful meeting with Madam Raima Kh. Shirinova, Vice Rector National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirza Ulegbek. We talked about ways and means to enhance contacts and cooperation between our two institutions. We agreed to assist each other's institution in academic matters related to research articles' evaluation and publication. I presented copies of Centre's research journal "Central Asia" to the Vice Rector. After that I had a meeting with Madam Gulchehra SH. Rikhsieva Rector Tashqand State Institute of Oriental Studies. Dr. Elyor A. Makhmoodov Vice Rector of the institute was also present in the meeting. We had a long discussion regarding academic and research cooperation

between the two institutions. I was also invited for lectures by Madam Gulchehra which I accepted as an honour. We agreed to develop a mechanism for action on these lines. I also visited the National Library of Uzbekistan where only few books in Urdu language were available unfortunately. I plan to send books and copies of journal to these institutions and library as well. For all these achievements I am grateful to his Excellency Furqat Siddiqov the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan considering my name as international observer for the Parliamentary Elections. The respect and hospitality which I enjoyed in Tashqand is unforgettable. I believe these contacts will be multiplied for enhanced academic and research cooperation between the two brotherly countries Pakistan and Uzbekistan.