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[Note: Using editorials as an indicator, this series presents views, understanding and attitude of the Urdu periodicals in India towards various developments concerning the Middle East. The selection of an item does not mean the endorsement or concurrence with their accuracy or views. *Editor, MEI@ND*]

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Roznama Rashtriya Sahara (National Sahara Daily), Delhi

Editorial, 18 December 2012, Tuesday

1. Referendum in Egypt

The final decision on the new look of the Egyptian constitution will become clear on 22 December when the final round of referendum will be conducted. However, some sources have reported that the constitution has received nearly 53 percent votes in favour and 43 percent against in the first round that was conducted last week. The new constitution endorses Shari'a as a source of law. Those who are opposing the new constitution want it to be secular and liberal. They have also argued that the referendum could have been deferred for some time. President Morsi has tried to give numerous powers to the president in the new constitution which resulted into a lot of opposition. Morsi had to scrap such provisions under public pressure. The draft constitution which is under referendum is very transparent.

As far as the religious nature of the draft constitution is concerned, one needs to think objectively. There is no denying the fact that religious books have inspired constitutions all over the world. Though, amendments and changes have been carried out at later stages according to new requirements. For example, the Israeli constitution flows from the Torah (sic). Similarly, the constitutions in European countries and the US also flow from the Bible.

Even though there are numerous clauses that do not have any direct mention in the Bible but they do not violate the basic tenets of the holy book. A recent incident where an Indian woman died due to pregnancy related complications was due to the clause in Irish constitution which does not allow abortion due to religious reasons.

Thus, the reservations on the religious character of the Egyptian constitution do not hold any substance. In fact, the US is not a secular state as secularism is understood to being non-religious in their context. However, there is a demarcation between religion and state. The most important aspect about a constitution should be according equal status to the minorities. As far as Egypt is concerned there are mainly three religious communities; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Though the draft constitution is not available, reports suggest that it does not discriminate on the basis of faith. Women have also been accorded equal status. If a constitution provides for equal status of all the citizens and does not discriminate on the basis of faith, race, ethnicity or any such matter then it should not be opposed just for the sake of opposition.

Source: <http://roznamasahara.samaylive.com/Details.aspx?id=83857&boxid=45138125>



**Dawat Online (Invitation), New Delhi
Editorial, 25 December 2012, Tuesday**

2. A New Policy for Gaza Strip

According to *The Jerusalem Post* Israel and Egypt have entered into secret talks to device a new policy for the Gaza Strip. The daily reported with reference to Israeli intelligence officials in its 21 December issue that the talks for a new Gaza plan is continuing. The aim of these talks is to ease the blockade on Gaza, to minimize the chances of rearming of Hamas and to keep Israeli-Egyptian contacts alive. The correspondent has claimed that Egypt had mediated the talks with Israel to end its attack on the Gaza Strip last month and has also taken responsibility to implement the ceasefire. The talks have continued since and have been confirmed by Israeli official sources. It has also been said that these things were said by former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy during his interactions in Bar-Ilan University.

Halevy has also claimed that Hamas leader Khalid Mashaal would not have been able to visit Gaza Strip without Israeli and Egyptian permissions. For example, the Iranian foreign Minister Ali Akber Salehi who wanted to visit Gaza twice but was not allowed to visit the tiny strip. Earlier the Qatari Emir was also allowed to visit Gaza in similar fashion. This was part of the agreement signed by Israel and Hamas after the Operation Pillar of Defence by Israel. Israel does not want rocket attacks from Gaza and Hamas has agreed to stop rocket attacks on Israel. On the other hand, Israel has agreed to stop target killings of Palestinian leaders. It has also been agreed that Israel will open all routes between Gaza and other areas and would not block all entrance to the Strip. This is not the first time that secret talks between Cairo and Jerusalem (sic) have been disclosed by former Israeli diplomat Shalom Cohen during his interaction with people at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Source: http://dawatonline.com/Archive_Editorial.aspx?sDate=25-dec-2012



The Etemaad Urdu Daily (The Confidence Urdu Daily), Hyderabad

Editorial, 25 December 2012, Tuesday

3. Shari'a: Basis for the New Egyptian Constitution

The new Egyptian constitution has been endorsed by the national referendum. Yet the response of the opposition shows that it is bracing for a fight at a time when Egypt needs to come out of the severe financial crisis. If the opposition is backed by external powers at this juncture, then Egypt will fall into further crisis.

The turnout in the first round of the referendum was only 31 percent, thus the opposition challenged the result but the second round witnessed a turnout of 70 percent validating the result. The main opposition National Salvation Front has rejected the result of the referendum and has said that it will continue its struggle. The Islamists have backed the new constitution and termed it a step forward in the implementation of democratic ethos two years after the fall of Mubarak. Liberal, Leftist and Christian leaders however are opposing the new constitution. These forces are opposing the new constitution because it endorses Shari'a as a source of law. However, if one looks closely, the new constitution accords equal status to all the religions, thus opposition on such grounds cannot be justified. The constitution is pluralist in nature and has provisions for participation of people of all faiths in the political process.

The NSF has alleged that such haste in putting the draft constitution under referendum has been done to get the endorsement for implementation of Islamic law. It says that individual freedom has been subjugated by provisions of Islamic laws. However, a close look at the draft constitution shows that it emphasizes on individual freedom. The constitution endorses the freedom of speech and equal status for every citizen without any discrimination on the basis of gender, faith, race and ethnicity. The new constitution has provisions for women's freedom and right to work.

It seems that the western media is working overtime to create confusion over the Egyptian constitution. The main opposition is using this confusion to create public opinion against the government. If the US wants to gain confidence of the Muslim world then it should stop interfering in the internal matters of a state. The electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is a result of failure of previous governments and it should get a chance to govern and show if it can deliver on its promises. Any external interference in internal matters of Egypt would be counterproductive.

Source: http://etemaaddaily.com/EtemaadArchive_files/Dec/25/editorial.html

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