



National P3

Swedish consulate opens in Erbil

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has visited Kurdistan Region for the first time to open his country's consulate. After a meeting with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Dr. Barham Salih, Bildt opened the Swedish Consulate in a large ceremony.

Culture P13

A Kurdish diva with desire



Business P7

Budget discussion leads to chaos in parliament

National P4

Trouble awaits Ninewa province at election time

Different lists and candidates have begun to campaign in all parts of Iraq for the March 7 general elections. And the nature of the electoral campaign in Ninewa province has its own characteristics due to long debates (concerning the nonexistence of a unified administration) between al-Hadba and Ninewa Brotherhood lists.

Gorran MP angers Peshmerga

P 5



GLOBE PHOTO/Qasim Khidhir

Controversial MP statement on Peshmerga forces sparks pre-election fury

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Democratic will of the people cannot be ignored

There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction.—Winston Churchill

Globe Editorial

As a tense political climate ensues in Kurdistan ahead of the critical Iraqi elections in March, the notion of change and evolution must be embraced; however, at this crucial historical juncture, the Kurds must be careful to guide their region toward a new dawn and not a tainted past.

Whilst democracy is a fledgling phenomenon in Iraq and not without its fair share of deficiencies and impediments, it is nevertheless a remarkable milestone, and the Iraqi elections of March 7 provide a chance for millions of Iraqis to be heard.

It is up to the people to voice their votes, but ultimately up to the politicians to deliver.

Iraq faces a tense battle on many fronts as people eagerly await electoral results. However, the notion of “change” must surely be at the pinnacle of any political manifesto for the next five years is to be successful.

This change comes in a number of forms. Same foot dragging over constitutional issues, budget and resource sharing, lack of reconciliation, chauvinist mentalities of the past, or a government who does not want to truly embrace democratic values, compromise and listen to the critical voice of the very people they have been voted to serve, then Iraq can be guaranteed one thing: The next

five years will be as unproductive, tiresome and problematic as ever.

Without the need for a greater change on many political levels, the same thorny issues put on ice over the past five years such as resolving disputed boundaries will lie in stalemate in five years’ time. Or worse still, without a flexible and all-encompassing democratic apparatus, violent resolution of these issues will occur.

New political horizon in Kurdistan

Remarkable progress on political, economic and social levels has been made in less than two decades since the liberation of Kurdistan. However, Kurdistan now finds itself at a critical crossroad—one that can truly propel it to a new standing both within Iraq and the Middle East, or one that will only induce echoes of past infighting, disunity and bureaucratic governance.

The progress of the Change Movement or Gorran from literally the backdoor to a major opposition as a result of the Kurdistan parliamentary elections last July—where it won a credible 25 seats or 23.57% of the vote—speaks volumes.

The basis for this new political horizon is in essence revealed in the name itself: Change. This motion is reflected in the millions of Kurds who demand changes

to living standards, political reform and more transparency.

However, change itself is a loose word. Whether Gorran is a direct rival of the PUK only or is a viable and effective alternative voice for all of Kurdistan remains to be seen.

The onus is on Gorran to push through the very ideal of change people have identified with them. This means that the plan for change needs to be structured, coordinated and implemented. The ruling elite in the KDP and PUK may embrace a common desire for change, but this change must be steered in the right direction and for results that will benefit the greater Kurdistan region both internally and in Baghdad.

A popular demand for change and the new political competitiveness should not mean disunity and crippling of Kurdish national interests. All Kurdish politicians have been elected by Kurds to serve Kurds.

There is nothing wrong with internal political jostling or heated campaigning, but such a destructive atmosphere in the form of media campaigns, grave insults and accusations, harsh exchange of words between leaders and violence guarantees only one thing—a big smile on the face of Kurdish adversaries.

Uncertainty of electoral outcome

There is fierce political jockeying in Kurdistan with more at stake than ever. The PUK dominance particularly in

Sulaimanyia and Kirkuk has been challenged, and the national elections will only reaffirm the views of the people.

With the new open-candidate list system serving to potentially further influence the PUK power sharing with KDP, there has been a lot of media coverage around the “demise” of the PUK.

Talk of such a decline is premature, but one thing is certain: Democracy practiced in a fair and just way does not lie. The results are derived from the opinions and choice of the people, and it is the will and choice of such people that must be protected and placed first.

This is the very essence of a healthy democracy and facilitating change in the right direction. If the bar has been raised as a result of the new political climate in Kurdistan, then the onus is on the likes of the KDP and PUK to raise the stakes, adopt reform and change the minds of the people. Any political system where politicians can rest on their laurels only guarantees slow progress, corruption and lack of services to the people.

By the same token, the Gorran movement becoming a major force in Kurdistan is only a starting point. There is no compulsion in a healthy democracy, and just as easily as millions can vote for you, millions can vote against you if their expectations are not met or political promises are not fulfilled.

Kurdish role in Baghdad

Although Gorran and

the Kurdistan Alliance will effectively campaign on two separate lists in the national elections, this does not mean it should be to the detriment of Kurdistan.

The overall strategic goals of the Kurds must be strengthened and not undermined as a result of the new Kurdish political awakening.

This does mean that the Gorran can now use its leverage to pressure the KDP and PUK into change or to introduce elements of its philosophies, which is only natural if you muster such a significant portion of votes. However, this should not mean that personal and political vendettas should see this new climate turn into a Kurdish nightmare.

This is about the Kurdish people and Kurdistan not supporting one group over another or turning this into a social or dynasty battle in Kurdistan.

The Kurds will once again have a kingmaker role in the next government, and their support for any coalition in Baghdad must see Kurds attain firm guarantees for their strategic goals in return.

Tense climate in Kurdistan

The recent heated debates and walkout in the Kurdish Parliament, violent friction in the Sulaimanyia province and the anger over the alleged labelling of the Peshmerga forces by a Gorran MP as a militia threatens to create a political and social divide in Kurdistan.

Such divide in the ‘90s resulted in civil war and

effectively meant that two Kurdistan administrations existed.

Status of Peshmerga forces

For Kurds, the word Peshmerga is etched in Kurdish folklore. Without the sacrifices and bravery of the thousands of such individuals who fought against repression and occupation, Kurdistan would never be where it is today.

Any labelling of the Peshmerga as a kind of militia is not only disrespectful and out of tone of Kurdish political standards and revered heritage, but will undoubtedly incite Kurdish sentiments ahead of elections. This is something we become accustomed to hearing from Baghdad, whose view of the Peshmerga as a militia is only to undermine the force and serve to weaken an element they see as a direct threat.

However, by the same token, politicisation of the forces should be discouraged at all costs. They should be embraced as a national Kurdish army to serve and protect all of Kurdistan. This is one example of where political polarisation of Kurdistan must change.

Uncertainty over the results of ballots and political anxiety should be seen as a sign of a healthy democracy. Politicians should fret over their performance at the polls and not walk into Parliament via a red carpet.

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