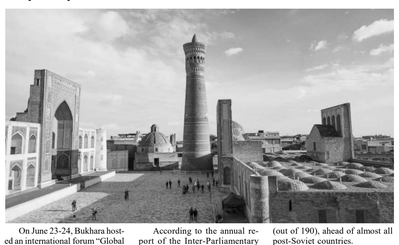
Bukhara forum: For sustainable development:, int'l dialogue and global cooperation between parliaments

By: Yuliya Sarimsakova



On June 23-24, Bukhara hosted an international forum "Global inter-parliamentary cooperation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals". The event turned out to be rich in thematic sessions, discussions, a number of important documents were also signed, in particular, the Bukhara Declaration was adopted.

During two days, the results achieved, existing problems and effective ways of solving them, tasks for the future were discussed. In particular, the forum participants considered the issue of establishing international dialogue and global cooperation between the world's parliaments in the interests of sustainable development.

The session was chaired by Ravshanbek Alimov, Chairman of the Senate Committee of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan on International Relations, Foreign Economic Relations, Foreign Investments and Tourism, Mathieu Lemoine, acting Coordinator of OSCE projects in Uzbekistan. It was noted that one of the important conditions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is partnership. And the establishment of systemic international dialogue and global cooperation between the parliaments of the world is one of the priority and key areas that make it possible to achieve the greatest effect in the implementation of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It should be noted that over the past four years, the activity of the Uzbek parliament in matters of foreign policy and the expansion of inter-parliamentary ties has significantly increased. The Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan actively cooperates in a bilateral format with foreign parliaments. The parties coordinate international efforts and agree on positions on the SDGs in international inter-parliamentary organizations, as well as exchange experience on creating mechanisms for the effective implementation of the tasks set.

The session discussed the issues of maximizing the impact and minimizing the costs of solving global problems, as well as the empowerment of women in the 2030 Agenda.

The session "Gender-oriented policy and development of youth parliamentary for sustainable development" turned out to be very fruitful. Participants noted that the SDGs are aimed at improving lives, living conditions and increasing the well-being of people.

Large-scale work is being carried out in Uzbekistan to ensure gender equality. Recently, the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in Uzbekistan until 2030 was approved, the goals and objectives of which and in many respects coincide with the UN SDGs, in particular, in matters of ensuring gender equality, access to the full range of services and the main components of human activities.

According to the annual report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union "Women in Parliament" and data from UN-Women, in 2020, for the first time in history, the global share of women in national parliaments was more than a quarter - 25.5 percent. According to the results of elections to the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan at the end of 2019, compatriots made up 32 percent of the deputies of the Legislative Chamber, 25 percent of the Senate. According to this indicator, Uzbekistan entered the top 50 countries, taking 37th place (out of 190), ahead of almost all post-Soviet countries.

In particular, in the World Bank's Women, Business and Law Index, Uzbekistan in 2020 entered the list of 27 countries that have implemented significant reforms in the field of women's rights and gender equality, climbed five positions and took 134th place out of 190 (in 2019 - 139th place).

More than 25 decrees and decrees of the President and government decrees were also adopted. A number of changes and additions have been made to strengthen efforts to prevent violence against women.

The republic is implementing consistent measures aimed at enhancing the role of parliament in improving legislation and law enforcement practice in this area. Thus, the Commission for Ensuring Gender Equality, the Committee for Women and Gender Equality in the upper house of parliament and others have been established.

At the session, it was noted that significant work is being done in Uzbekistan to develop youth parliamentarism: a Youth Parliament has been created under the Oliy Majlis. Its tasks are to protect the interests of young people, raise their problems to the level of parliamentary discussion, prepare future politicians, stimulate young men and women striving to achieve important goals and implement specific projects.

The country approved the Concept for the Development of State Youth Policy in Uzbekistan until 2025, aimed at improving the regulatory framework aimed at protecting the legitimate rights and interests of the younger generation, creating decent working conditions for boys and girls, expanding their economic opportunities, developing entrepreneurial activity and other measures.

During the session, issues of ensuring international dialogue and global partnership with the parliaments of the Asia-Pacific region to achieve gender equality, youth parliamentary in the European Union, Turkey, participation of Afghan women in public life and their social activities, and other topics were considered.

At the final session, Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan Tanzila Narbaeva stressed the extreme importance of global inter-parliamentary cooperation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

It was noted that the proposal of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev on the adoption of a special resolution of the UN General Assembly, aimed at further increasing the role of parliaments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, strengthening the effectiveness of parliamentary control and ensuring human rights, was supported by parliamentarians and foreign experts.

It is also proposed to hold a global forum once every two years to discuss the work done during this period, achievements, challenges of regional and global scales, and the adoption of joint programs aimed at specific results.

Sri Lanka zoo lion contracts COVID-19 as reports of animal infections rise

COLOMBO — Thor is an 11-year-old, well-built male lion at Sri Lanka's National Zoological Gardens in the Colombo suburb of Dehiwala. He's something of an icon at the zoo, famed for his regal appearance. Thor should have been enjoying a hassle-free period with his partner, Sheena, and their two cubs in their special den as the COVID-19 lockdown kept visitors away for weeks. But in early June, Thor fell ill, going off food and showing breathing difficulties.

In neighboring India, zoos had reported some of their lions contracting COVID-19 around the same time, so the veterinarians at Dehiwala feared the worst. They took samples of urine and saliva from their lion and carried out PCR tests. The results, released June 15, confirmed that Thor had contracted the coronavirus. Zookeepers took measures to keep him isolated from his family and started him on a medical regime to alleviate his symptoms. "We are constantly monitoring his condition," said Ishini Wickremesinghe, the zoo's director general. Authorities also placed the lion's keepers under self-quarantine and carried out PCR tests on zoo employees; a gardener tested positive for COVID-19.

"We believe the lion may have got COVID from a zookeeper. We have taken measures to safeguard our employees and animals running the risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2," Wikremesinghe told Mongabay. It is important to get saliva samples to carry out a PCR test, but sticking one's hand inside a lion's mouth to get a sample is a daunting mission. Vets would usually tranquilize an animal before taking a sample of their body fluids, but as Thor was weak, the Dehiwala zoo vets chose not to sedate him. Instead, they used bait coated with cotton wool, then retrieved the discarded and saliva-soaked cotton wool after Thor was done eating the bait.

The saliva samples were then sent to the molecular, nutrition biochemistry laboratory at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science of the University of Peradeniya, which can perform PCR tests for animal samples. "The COVID-19 PCR test performed on animals is similar to the human PCR test, but mainly focuses on tracing the virus family," said lab supervisor Dilan Satharasinghe, a senior lecturer with the animal science department at Peradeniya. Samples of the virus have been sent to Hong Kong University for further analysis, Satharasinghe said. The SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 impacts the respiratory system, and the symptoms can be deadly. It's considered a zoonotic disease that jumped from animals to humans, but there have been confirmed cases where humans have transmitted it to animals, mostly pet dogs and cats. Sri Lanka has increased its surveillance over wild and farm animals to support early detection of the virus. Image courtesy of Dilan Satharasinghe. "Not all animal species are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2" said Malik Peiris, a Sri Lankan virologist with the University of Hong Kong who is credited with isolating the original SARS virus. Peiris's lab was also the first to show reverse zoonosis of SARS-CoV-2 from humans to animals in Hong Kong, identifying infections among dogs in households with COVID-19 patients. However, it's important to note that there's no evidence that infected animals can transmit the virus back to humans, Peiris told Mongabay. Other domesticated animals, such as poultry and pigs, aren't susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection, but mink bred for the fur industry are extremely sensitive to infection, leading to major outbreaks in mink farms in Europe and the U.S., Peiris said.

The first confirmed case of a zoo animal contracting COVID-19 was reported from Bronx Zoo in New York in April 2020, when a tigress named Nadia tested positive. Subsequently three more tigers and three African lions at the Bronx Zoo also tested positive for COVID-19, but all have since recovered. Animals at other zoos have also contracted the virus, including at Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Chennai, India, where nine lions tested positive and two died.

Nepal inks $150-mn loan pact with World Bank for post-Covid growth

Nepal inked a concessional loan agreement of USD 150 million with the World Bank (WB) on Sunday for post-COVID-19 recovery and development.

Nepal Finance Secretary Sishir Kumar Dhungana and WB, Country Director, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, Faris Hadad-Zervos, signed the loan document.

A concessional loan is a debt instrument where more favourable terms are agreed upon for the borrower than the market place. After signing the agreement, Dhungana said the funds will help Nepal build back better and greener, especially in view of the adverse effects of the pandemic.

"The proposed budgetary support will be utilised in infrastructure projects and economic recovery... according to the requirements and priorities of the government, he said.

"The financial assistance will help speed up the ongoing large development projects, creating jobs, accelerate markets, and support green recovery," the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

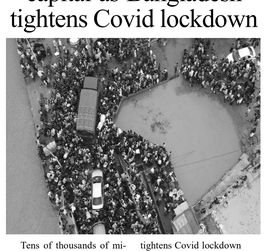
Meanwhile, Nepal reported 1,920 new cases of coronavirus on Sunday, taking the nationwide tally to 665,777. The death toll rose to 9,009 with 34 more fatalities, heath officials said.

Authorities said 6,000 swab samples were taken for RT-PCR tests in the last 24 hours, of which 1,353 results returned positive. The virus was detected among 567 people in antigen tests conducted on 3,836 people in the same period.

There are 40,336 active coronavirus cases in the country. The number of people who have recovered from the disease is 584,334.

In the last 24 hours, 3,007 people have recovered from the disease. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 92.2 per cent.

Migrant workers flee capital as Bangladesh tightens Covid lockdown



Tens of thousands of migrant workers fled Bangladesh's capital Sunday on the eve of a tightened lockdown that will curtail most economic activity and confine people to their homes as coronavirus infections soar.

Restrictions on activities and movement have been in place since mid-April as cases and deaths jumped.

Infections declined in May but started to rise again this month, with just over 6,000 daily cases on Thursday and 108 deaths on Friday, according to the health ministry -- the highest in more than two months.

The resurgence has prompted the government to toughen restrictions in stages from Monday, with economic activity -- including shops, markets, transportation and offices -- to shut down by Thursday.

People will be ordered to stay at homes while only emergency services and export-oriented factories continue operations.

The coming closure has sparked an exodus from Dhaka, the capital.

With public inter-city transportation already suspended since June 22, people have squeezed into rickshaws, hopped onto motorbikes and even hired ambulances to make their way to their villages.

Ferries have been operating on overdrive, with some running services 24 hours a day and cramming more than 1,000 passengers onto each trip.

"We don't want them to overcrowd the ferry. But they don't listen," said police sub-inspector Mohammad Reza. "There is a mad rush of people."

A senior official at the state-run Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation told AFP that at least 50,000 people had crossed the river by ferries on Sunday alone.

At a river station in the rural town of Sreenagar about 70 kilometres (43 miles) south of Dhaka, thousands queued from early Sunday to cross the Padma, a tributary of the Himalayan river the Ganges.

"We did not have any choice but to leave the city," Fatema Begum, 60, told AFP while waiting for a ferry.

"During lockdown, there is no work. And if we don't work, how do we pay rent? So we packed up everything and are going back to our village."

Mohammad Masum, 30, a street vendor in Dhaka, said it was better to return home and "spend the time with family" than be confined in the capital.

Bangladesh has reported more than 880,000 infections and just over 14,000 virus deaths, but experts say the actual toll could be much higher due to possible underreporting.

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