

## **Abdul Hasib Aryan: Minor Candidate With High Hopes**

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Former policeman promises clean government and rights for women, but hasn't the money to fund his election campaign.

Abdul Hasib Aryan, a former policeman who is running for president in the October 9 election, may not have as much money as other more famous candidates - but he's still been insisting that he's going to win.

Aryan told IWPR he is one of the poorest candidates, which means his election campaign has been nowhere near as lavish as those of some of his rivals.

He accused some of his rivals of handing out gifts - even 4x4 vehicles - to prospective voters. While he regrets that he doesn't have the same resources for his campaign, Aryan says that at least his own past is clean: he hasn't stolen from the public purse or been involved in war crimes.

"People may get money and vehicles from candidates, but they must remember that God is watching them, and they should vote for someone who won't lead them into bloodshed over the next five years," he said.

By Wednesday, however, Aryan conceded he had no chance of being elected and said he was withdrawing from the race. Although his name will still appear on the ballot, he urged his supporters to vote for the incumbent president, Hamed Karzai, instead.

Born in 1961 in the Ashiqan-e-Arifan district of eastern Kabul to an educated family, Aryan went to Kabul University in 1978 and took an arts degree before signing up for the police academy in 1983. After graduation he was commissioned as an officer in the police force.

Aryan served in the police until the end of the communist era. When the mujahedin swept into Kabul and ousted President Najibullah's regime, Aryan - like many police officers - was dismissed. Later on, the mujahedin-led authorities recalled him and he spent three years doing police training work, before resigning because, he says, he had lost all confidence in the government.

During the years of Taleban rule, Aryan remained in Kabul but kept his head down, working as a trader. After the Taleban were toppled in late 2001, he rejoined the police and rose to the rank of colonel before resigning earlier this year to run for the presidency.

He's been standing as an independent, and says he has never been a member of any party and has no links to any of the established political groupings. He has set up his own group called Harakat-e-Milli, the National Movement, but he says its mission is to help people in need rather than develop into a party.

Aryan told IWPR that he didn't think a lack of political experience is any impediment, saying, "I'm running for the presidency because people demanded I did. I have no desire to have any political structure in future, because it's been proven that political parties in power pursue their own aims and goals instead of working for the people."

Despite his apparently low chance of success, Aryan had remained upbeat, insisting that he could win the election. He told IWPR he had been on the campaign trail in places as far apart as Paktia, Zabul, Khost and Kandahar in the south, Mazar-e-Sharif in the north and Herat in the west - and "about 70 per cent" of people indicated they would support him.

"When the ballot boxes are put in place, we will see which candidate people vote for - Karzai, [General Abdul Rashid] Dostum and the rest, or Aryan," he said.

He thinks the upcoming election will count as free, fair and transparent because everyone eligible to vote has got a registration card and has the right to choose their president.

Aryan had been promising a new kind of administration, and a focus on social concerns.

"I made myself a presidential candidate with one purpose: to rescue our people - God willing - from misery, terror, lack of housing, unemployment, poverty and illiteracy, with the help of the international community. Our only desire is a secure Afghanistan," he said.

Asked how he would do all this, he replied, "In Afghanistan we have a lot of major mines. If we can form a centralised government and achieve a 20 per cent shift away from the 'satanic triangle' of terrorism, narcotics smuggling and warlords, I can say for certain that Afghanistan will be a halfway self-sufficient country."

The candidate's social programme included building schools across the country to help eradicate illiteracy, pursuing mine clearance, and reforming the current demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration programme, DDR, for ex-combatants. "When we implement this programme, we will not be like the present government which is paying [former soldiers] 50 or 100 [US] dollars; we will try to find jobs for those who lay down their arms, we will build factories to prevent high level of unemployment," he said.

Aryan is scathing about past Afghan regimes for the role they played in conflict and destruction over the years, and about the warlords who still plunder the country.

"If I win, I will create a just environment, and I'll probably issue a decree ordering a full investigation into who the real mujahedin are, and who the criminals are," he pledged.

He is against a broad-based coalition which would include factions previously involved in fighting, saying, "I am sure that in my future government I won't be in coalition with the individuals Mr Karzai has on board - these people have blood on their hands.

"My government will be one that includes scholars and professors from all over Afghanistan, not people who have worked against the national interest."

And he warned that he would stand up to any external power that tried to interfere in Afghanistan, saying, "If any country allows the 'satanic triangle' [terror, drugs and warlordism] to come across our borders, I will react vigorously. "

Finally, Aryan's election platform includes an ambitious set of promises to female voters, such as equal rights for women in all areas of life, and a pledge to earmark six ministerial posts for women. "One ministry for women's affairs is not enough; we need female advisers and ministers in the cabinet," he said.

He also wants women to be allowed to work in commerce, explaining that "women have been deceived by all governments in the past, in a way that was not in line with the Koran. People have discriminated against women and their rights have always been violated".

While Aryan believes all 18 candidates need to come together to formulate a common set of policies for Afghanistan, he went on to say he himself did not agree with any of the others, "I have made up my mind not to form a coalition with any of them, and I will never do that. My movement will be independent and it will prove this to the people by its deeds."

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