



Possible election delay worries reform panel member  
By: HASSAN KHETAB ,Date: 2015-03-28

KABUL (Pajhwok): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has said without fundamental reforms in electoral panels, no elections will take place in the country. Based on a decree by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, an electoral reform commission was formed on March 20. The commission, however, has not yet embarked on its task. The panel, comprised of 15 individuals, will clean up the system and improve the electoral panels, rebuild public trust and prevent fraud in future polls. Gul Ahmad Madadzai, a member of the commission, said there was a possibility of the panel starting work after the president and CEO's returned from the US. Madadzai expressed concerns about a possible delay in the upcoming parliamentary elections. "Although nobody talks about delay, the situation shows it may happen." Based on the constitution, the electoral panels have to announce the date for the parliamentary elections 180 days in advance, he explained. Less than 100 days are left in the parliamentary elections, but nobody had discussed its schedule so far, he regretted, saying the procrastination was against the law. Earlier, Independent Election Commission (IEC) chief,



No debate as amendments to law on poll panels tabled

By: ABASIN ZAHEER ,Date: 2015-03-30

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Wolesi Jirga on Monday could not debate draft amendments to the law on composition, duties and powers of the two electoral commissions due to incomplete quorum. Mohammad Obda, who heads the lower house's panel on justice and judiciary, tabled the bill and said the joint commission had discussed the package of six amendments to the law and had difference of opinion on three revisions. Under the law's clause 8th and 22nd, the president is recommended 27 persons to choose nine of them as commissioners on the Independent Election Commission and 15 persons to select five of them as members of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. But Obda said the draft amendments suggested these appointments be made in agreement between the president and the chief executive officer. He said some members of the joint commission had suggested the inclusion of another two clauses to the law, but others opposed their suggestion. He said one of the amendments authorised members of the two commissions to remove the leadership, deputies and secretaries if they worked against the rules. But there was no discussion on the amendments as some lawmakers said the parliament was in its last legislative year and could not amend the law on duties, powers and composition of the election bodies. They said the law on duties, powers and composition of the electoral bodies was part of the electoral law and the house should not discuss or make a decision in this regard. The Article 109 of the Constitution says "proposals for amending elections law shall not be included in the work agenda of the National Assembly during the last year of the legislative term." But Obda said the house could debate the law because it had been framed in compliance with the Article 56 of the Constitution. However, first deputy speaker, Haji Zahir Qadir, who presided over the session, said the house could not take a decision due to incomplete quorum. He also suggested the joint commission should once again discuss the propose amendments. The acting head of the Independent Commission for overseeing the implementation of the Constitution, Gul Rahman Qazi, told Pajhwok Afghan News the assembly could not debate or amend the law on the two commissions because it was serving the last year of the legislative term. He said the law was part of the electoral law and could not be decided upon by the parliament.



ACSEN voices concern at delay in electoral reforms  
By: HASSAN KHETAB ,Date: 2015-03-30

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Afghanistan Civil Society and Election Network (ACSEN) on Monday voiced its concern at the selection of the newly-created reform panel members and the delay in initiating the task. The network welcomed Ashraf Ghani's decree creating the commission, but said most of its members had been chosen by the president and the chief executive officer (CEO) themselves. It said civil society activists had been given little representation on the important panel --- something that could compromise impartial decisions. ACSEN head Jandad Spin Ghar told a news conference here: "A majority of members are related to the president and the CEO and we are concerned the body will be politically influenced and people will not trust it." He believed the commission would be unable to bring reforms in line people's expectations in the current composition. Electoral reforms are part of the national unity government agreement between the president and the CEO. The 15-member commission is aimed to bring reforms to the electoral system and build people's trust in the process, law enforcement and prevention of fraud. Spin Ghar said final decisions from the commission depended on president's approval, affecting the body's independence. Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) head Naeem Ayubzada, also a member of ACSEN, said the president's decree had some problems which needed to be reviewed and corrected. "I see no clear political will on the part of the government to bring about electoral reforms. It seems difficult to conduct free and fair parliamentary elections, and we are concerned about it," he remarked. ACSEN members said the reforms commission should devise its plans that enabled civil society activists and experts to work closely with it and share their suggestions and views. The commission should also hold public hearings before taking decisions so that people could trust it, the network suggested.



Khost PC members accuse governor of corruption  
By: MOHAMMAD HAROON ,Date: 2015-03-24

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): Some provincial council (PC) members on Tuesday accused the governor of southeastern Khost province of incompetency and administrative corruption, but others rejected their allegations. Some PC members joined by two lawmakers Humayun and Kamal Nasir Osoli addressed a press conference in Khost City, the provincial capital, calling for the provincial leadership to be replaced. Osoli, a lower house member from Khost, alleged corruption had reached the peak in many provincial departments, including judiciary, due to interferences by some senior government officials. The lawmaker accused Governor Abdul Jabbar Naeemi of blocking some projects the central government had approved as a result of lawmakers' efforts. "It was due to our efforts, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) released \$5 million for the Hindu farm agriculture project and then we obtained \$2 million for the project from the Karzai government, but the land allotted to the project is yet to be vacated because the governor wants to construct a multi-storey building on the land." One of the eight members, Qamar Ali Lakanwal, told Pajhwok Afghan News President Ashraf Ghani should fire graft-tainted officials in Khost. He set the president Saturday as a deadline to remove corrupt officials and warned of launching a protest movement with people's support if the president did not do so. But the governor's spokesman, Mubariz Zadran, rejected the allegations against the governor and other provincial officials as baseless. He told Pajhwok Afghan News: "The governor presided over maiden meeting of the provincial council about three weeks ago, when the public reps praised good governance, rule of law, implementation of development and reconstruction projects and other welfare efforts in Khost as unparalleled," he recalled. Zadran wondered how the PC members could change their stance so quickly, negating on their previous views about all the achievements.

Similarly, the provincial council head, Amirullah ZrahSwand and three others members of the council, Qimat Khan Mangal, Wagma Arzo and Zuhra Jalal, criticised their other colleagues for not making efforts to prevent administrative corruption. Zrah Swand said he would not support the other members in their allegations against the governor because he deemed their action as inappropriate. While Mangal said some lawmakers and PC members wanted to create anarchy in the province for their own interests.



US to keep 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through 2015  
By: LALIT K JHA ,Date: 2015-03-25

WASHINGTON (Pajhwok): Bowing to a request from his Afghan counterpart, US President Barack Obama on Tuesday decided to maintain the current troop level of 9,800 in Afghanistan through the end of the current year. "Based on President Ghani's request for flexibility in the drawdown timeline, the US will maintain its current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015," an official announcement said after talks between the two leaders. The specific trajectory of the 2016 US troop drawdown would be established later in 2015 to enable the American force consolidation to a Kabul-based embassy presence by the end of 2016, the joint statement said. It added: "This flexibility reflects the re-invigorated partnership, which is aimed at making Afghanistan secure and preventing it from being used to launch terrorist attacks." Reconciliation and a political settlement remained the surest way to achieve the full retrograde of US and foreign troops from Afghanistan in a way that safeguards international interests and peace in Afghanistan. Obama welcomed Afghan-Pakistan peace talks initiated by Ghani and reiterated his support for Kabul-led negotiations with the Taliban. "Obama welcomed recent developments in Afghan-Pakistani relations."

Both leaders emphasised the importance of continued efforts to advance Afghan-Pakistan dialogue aimed at building trust and producing tangible progress in the peace process, and improving the security situation in the region. While reaffirming their determination to cooperate against those who advocate violence and extremism, Obama and Ghani stressed the need for an Afghan-led peace process, enjoying regional support, in particular from Pakistan. As a part of the outcome of any such process, the Taliban and other armed groups must end violence, break ties with international terrorist groups and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of women and minorities. "Ghani and Chief Executive (Abdullah emphasised their mutual and strong determination to advance a reconciliation process based on these principles," said the statement at the end of the White House meeting. Obama reaffirmed strong US support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process and committed to make available additional financial support for the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to facilitate the peaceful reintegration of former combatants into their local communities. Calling on all countries in the region to support Afghanistan's security and prosperity, the presidents endorsed efforts to deepen the Heart of Asia Process and expressed appreciation to China for hosting the October 2014 summit and to Pakistan for hosting the next meeting this year. "The visit offered an opportunity to renew US-Afghan relations, review the joint achievements of the last 13 years in Afghanistan, and to discuss the actions each country needs to take to ensure that the social, economic, security and human rights gains made over that period are sustained and advanced," the statement said.



Wolesi Jirga speaker chides MPs over absenteeism  
By: ABASIN ZAHEER ,Date: 2015-03-25

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Wolesi Jirga speaker on Wednesday regretted that absenteeism among public representatives impeded the lower house business, including decisions on issues of public interest.

Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi raised the quorum issue at a time when only 67 of 246 members were present in the assembly session. As a result, he said, the house could not take decisions on agenda items. If the lawmakers had been regularly attending the assembly sessions, they would have been able to summon at least two ministers over Farkhanda's lynching in Kabul and the killing of passengers in Maidan Wardak, he added. Ibrahimi said: "If we had summoned the ministers, the people would have realised that we are their representatives. Our mere complaints against ministers won't address the issue; we have to exercise our discretion." On Monday, the minister of interior and defence, as well as and the National Directorate of Security deputy chief, were summoned to answer lawmakers' questions on growing violence. About 60 legislators put questions to the top security bosses. But only 33 were present when the ministers and the NDS official started answering their queries. He requested members to take active part in sessions. "Due to the quorum issue, we have no agenda for today's session. Parliament can't be run like this," deplored the speaker. MP Haider Jan Naeemzoy said most of members were busy doing personal things or going on foreign visits. He asked the administrative board to take strict actions against the absent members.

Karzai, who ruled the post-Taliban country for 13 years. Karzai spurned as propaganda a claim by American officials and intelligence sources that he was being treated for a bipolar condition because he is a manic-depressive. "They were wrong. This is an example of how propaganda was conducted... to tarnish my image and weaken me and throw me into insignificance," he observed. But such wild insinuations had produced the opposite effect in country, where his popularity with the people had dramatically increased, Karzai continued. He differed with America's approach to fighting terrorism, believing a US military was not in the interest of Afghanistan. The mismatch of perceptions kept him from signing the Bilateral Security Agreement with the US. "I felt that the war on terror that the US had come to Afghanistan to fight was not conducted the way it should have been," he remarked. He maintained "The talk was in one direction, but the walk was in another. The talk was towards Pakistan and sanctuaries in Pakistan, but the action was taking place in Afghanistan against civilians."



Former president rules out political comeback

By: JAVED HAMIM KAKAR ,Date: 2015-03-29

KABUL (Pajhwok): Ex-president Hamid Karzai has ruled out the possibility of staging a political comeback, supporting continuity of the democratic order. In an interview with an American new channel, Karzai said had played his political role as two-term president. "It would be a failure on my part and on the part of Afghanistan if I were to return." He told CNBC new generation of Afghans leaders should serve the country, which must have new presidents and continuity of the political process rather than stagnation. "My return... would be stagnation, and that's not good for Afghanistan," said