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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

April 16-23 2015

“I will pay special heed to Afghanistan’s media and press.”

16 new ministers take oath

Javed Hamim Kakar, 21 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Sixteen ministers who got trust vote from Wolesi Jirga were sworn-in by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday morning in Kabul. The 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostam, Mohammad Sarwar Danish, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah and 1st deputy CEO Eng. Mohammad Khan were present during the oath-taking ceremony, a statement from the Presidential Palace said.

The new ministers pledged to follow the teachings of Islam, implement constitutions and state laws, remain loyal to the independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and work honestly for the benefit of people, the statement said. After the end of the ceremony, the president congratulated the new ministers and wished them success in their new assignments.

WJ approves all 16 ministers-designate

Abasin Zaheer, 18 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament on Saturday approved President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani’s picks for 16 ministries. Of 239 lawmakers attended the session, 184 voted in favour of proposed nominee for Minister of Higher Education Dr. Farida Momand.

Asadullah Hanafi Balkhi minister-designate for education secured 161 votes, Ali Ahmad Osmani minister-designate for energy and water 168 votes and Asadullah Zameer, nominee for agriculture ministry grabbed 192 votes. As many as 170 ballots were cast in favour of minister-designate for commerce and industries, 120 in favor of Abdul Bari Jahani nominee for information and culture ministry. Sayed Mansour Naderi won a high number of 202 votes, declaring minister for urban development affairs. Nasrin Oryakhail, nominee for ministry of labor, social affairs and martyrs bagged 169 votes, Dilbar Nazari, minister-designate women affairs won 131 votes and Engineer Mahmood Baligh secured 168 votes and became minister for public works. Ghani’s choice for

counternarcotics portfolio Salamat Azimi bagged 155 votes and transport and civil aviation minister-designate Dr. Mohammadullah Batash won 176 votes. Similarly, Dr. Abdul Basir Anwar nominee for the ministry of justice won 138 votes and Mohammad Gulab Mangal became minister for borders and tribal affairs with 188 votes. Abdul Razaq Wahidi, minister -designate for information technology and communication, was also confirmed as minister with securing 152 votes.

Abdul Sattar Murad declared as economy minister by getting 152 votes. More than two weeks back, the government introduced 16 ministers-designate for a vote of confidence and the session held today to complete the long delayed process. Over 239 lawmakers attended the today’s session and the minister-designate needed 120 votes to be declared winner for the post. Earlier, the government introduced 25 ministers-designate and heads of two independent departments out of which only eight ministers and director of the spy agency managed to win trust vote.

Jahani also makes way to present plans to WJ

Abasin Zaheer, 18 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Abdul Bari Jahani, minister-designate for information and culture, on Saturday presented plans to the lower house of parliament after his second nationality was revoked. More than two weeks back the unity government introduced its picks for 16 remaining posts for a vote of confidence. As many as 15 of the nominees presented their future plans to the lawmakers, but Jahani was barred because of his dual nationality, pending his US nationality cancellation.

Of 153 lawmakers, 150 accepted Ministry of Foreign Affairs letter regarding Jahani’s second citizenship cancellation and voted for him to present his future programmes. While presenting his plans, Jahani assured to work for a balanced promotion of culture in the country. He promised to create a new department responsible for preserving historical monuments and relics. Jahani also said to pay special heed in developing Afghanistan’s press and media.

“ Removing Afg. airlines from EU’s blacklist my top priority.”



Above: New ministers take oath at Presidential Palace. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Aviation minister-designate vows sovereign airspace

Abasin Zaheer, 15 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Ministers-designate for education, public works, women’s affairs and transport and civil aviation explained their future plans on Wednesday to lower house members. The four were among 16 cabinet nominees President Ashraf Ghani had recently introduced to the parliament for a vote of confidence.

Explaining his plans, Assadullah Hanif Balkhi, the minister-designate for education, said the sector had many achievements in the last 14 years but some shortcomings remained. He said there were still a lot of children, mostly girls, who could not go to school for several socio-economic reasons. He said he would pay special heed to the education of girls. Standardising the education system, fighting administrative graft and building more schools would be among his priorities, said Balkhi. He promised to increase teachers’ wages and provide them with scholarship opportunities abroad if he wins a vote of trust from the house.

While, Dilbar Nazari, the women’s affairs minister-designate, said she would appoint highly capable and educated women on top positions in the ministry and would establish a research centre. She would work to enable women to reach top posts in several government organs. Her other priorities would be seeking justice for women, and programmes that enhanced their abilities in all walks of life. She added, after receiving the trust vote, she would also work to bring about changes to the lives of women suffering from abject poverty and in this regard, she would work out programmes in coordination with parliament.

The public works minister-designate, Mahmood Baligh, promised to create programmes for reforms and enhancing capabilities of the ministry’s employees. “I will try to spend the ministry’s budget within the given deadline,” he said, adding that he would pay special heed to fighting corruption and promoting nascent railways in the country. If endorsed, he would also work on developing and maintaining major highways and ring roads. “I will serve the entire country equally.” Mohammadullah Batash, the transport and civil aviation

minister-designate, said his top priority would be removing Afghanistan’s airlines from the European Union’s blacklist and controlling the country’s airspace. “From zero to 16,000 feet the airspace is in our control and from 16,000 to 29,000 feet is controlled by international forces and above that is again in our own control. I would try through forming a committee to assume control of sovereign airspace,” he said. He said Afghanistan currently charged each international flight \$400 in tax and he would increase the amount if granted the trust vote. Solving all problems currently faced by the national carrier, Ariana Afghan Airlines, reactivating city transport buses and setting up a meteorological university would be his other priorities.

The Wolesi Jirga announced that the minister-designate for information and culture, Abdul Bari Jehani, held dual citizenship and he would not be allowed to present his plans unless his American nationality was revoked. The unity government is yet to introduce a candidate to head the Ministry of Defence and the parliament is yet to set in motion granting the trust vote to nominees who have already presented their plans.

‘Absence of defence minister linked to Badakhshan tragedy’

Naheed Bashrdost, 16 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Civil Movement for Social Justice (CMSJ) on Thursday condemned killing and beheading of soldiers in northeastern Badakhshan province, asking the government to urgently introduce a nominee for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Chief of Army Staff. Based on reports, at least 27 Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers were killed after a group of heavily-armed insurgents attacked security check posts in Juram district of Badakhshan.

At least eight of the soldiers were then beheaded. Killing and beheading of the soldiers were widely condemned across the country. The government failure to appoint defence minister was blamed for massive failure in Badakhshan. Director CMSJ Ahmad Zaki told journalists in Kabul the unity government wasted around eight months to name an efficient person to head the vital Ministry of Defence. “The result is what we see today. A rise in suicide bombings and fighting, surge in violence

“The result of not having a defence minister is what we see.”

against women, increase in kidnappings on highways and rampant poverty and unemployment,” he added. Ahmad Shah Stanikzai, another CMSJ member, hailed the bravery of soldiers in Badakhshan province, saying despite lack of leadership, air support, and heavy weaponry they fought till their last bullets. He blamed government’s shortcomings for the death of the soldiers. The CMSJ urged the government to introduce a nominee

for MoD, and chief of army staff. They also asked the government to prosecute those officials who did not perform their duties diligently. It is widely believed that differences between President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah have resulted in delay to pick a nominee for the ministry of defence.



Above: A presser by CMSJ. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Faryab HPC director survives bomb attack

Qutbuddin Kohi, 16 April 2015

MAIMANA (Pajhwok): Director High Peace Council (HPC) for northwestern Faryab province has survived a bomb attack, an official said on Thursday. An official wishing anonymity told Pajhwok Afghan News the bomb was planted in front of HPC Director Maulvi Jamali in Tanori area of Maimana City, the provincial capital. The source said the bomb went-off around 8: 00 pm last night but no one suffered injuries.

Investigation into the incident had been launched, the official said. Jamali said the explosion was so powerful that it left windowpanes of his home smashed. Jamali who is also head of the Jamiat-i-Islami Party in Faryab said: “This is the handiwork of Taliban because I have rejected suicide attacks and they have times warned me repeatedly.” He said around 300 insurgents have joined peace process as a result of his efforts in Faryab. Two years abck, insurgents lobbed a hand grenade into Jamali’s house but caused no casualty.

New minister seeks wider role for women in govt

Naheed Bashrdost, 19 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): New Women’s Affairs Minister Dilbar Nazari on Sunday said the government should appoint females as governors, district chiefs and secretaries so as the gender could play a wider role in the country’s political, economical and social development. The Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament on Saturday approved President Ashraf Ghani’s picks for 16 ministries.

Dilbar Nazari, who received 131 votes from 239 lawmakers present at yesterday’s session, was among

the ministers approved. Earlier, women’s rights activists had demanded one-thirds of cabinet portfolios to be given to women. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs has welcomed the approval of four women as ministers by parliament, but urged more representation for females in other public sector departments. Syed Muzgan Mustafavi, the Women’s Affairs Ministry secretary, said woman ministers should not play a symbolic role, but a complete and independent role exercising powers bestowed on them.

Addressing a conference on women’s socio-economic rights, she said four women as ministers could not resolve challenges women faced in society. She urged women to utilise their capacity on leadership level, asking the government to appoint females as governors, mayors, district chiefs and judges. Muzgan said women had been contributing to the country’s economic development and separate markets should be established for them so that they could contribute in more effective way.

The ouster of despotic Taliban regime in 2001 enabled many women to work on various key government posts during the past 13 years. They include Sairah Shikaib, the Faizabad district chief in northern Jawzjan province, Habiba Surabi, a former governor of central Bamyana province, Tayaba Khawari, a provincial council head. Uzra Jafari had worked as the mayor of central Daikundi province and Marya Bashir as the attorney general in Herat.

Kabul not to allow use of its soil against neighbours

Ahmad Qureshi, 19 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani during his visit to Iran pledged he would not allow

“We agreed to have intelligence and security cooperation to counter drug trafficking.”

Afghanistan's soil to be used against other countries for insurgent or any other violent activities. Earlier, President Ghani along with high-level delegation left for Iran on Sunday morning on a two-day visit to discuss range of issues of bilateral interests with officials in Tehran, a statement from the Presidential Palace said.

The president, the statement said is scheduled to meet his Iranian counterpart Dr. Hassan Rouhani and other high officials during his visit. Both countries' foreign ministers are expected to sign a bilateral cooperation deal. Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq, deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Salahuddin Rabani, foreign minister, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, National Security Adviser, Eklil Hakimi, finance minister, Dawood Shah Sabah, minister of Mines and Petroleum, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, minister for Refugees and Repatriation and other high officials accompanied the president.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said that his country and neighboring Afghanistan have agreed on intelligence and security cooperation as part of efforts to

combat illicit drugs trafficking and terrorism, Iranian Media reports Sunday. In a joint press conference with his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in Tehran, Rouhani said: "Concerning the issue of narcotics, which is a menace beleaguering the region, Iran and Afghanistan itself, we agreed to have intelligence and security cooperation to counter drug trafficking rings."

Rouhani said Tehran and Kabul agreed to share intelligence on terrorism, violence and extremism in the region, including in Afghan regions bordering Iran, and conduct joint operations if need be. He added that talks were also held on the issue of Afghan refugees currently residing in Iran, stressing that an agreement was reached on the adoption of measures to register all Afghans now living in Iran. Turning to the ongoing crisis in Yemen, Rouhani urged all regional countries to formulate political solutions for issues that have turned violent, and help Yemeni people to solve their own problems at the negotiating table and establish peace and calm in their crisis-hit country.



Above: President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Pres. Hassan Rohani of Iran address journalists. Tehran, Iran.

MPs ask govt to revisit security deal with US

Abasin Zaheer, 20 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Frustrated over growing insecurity in much of the country, Wolesi Jirga members on Monday asked the government to revisit the bilateral security agreement (BSA) with the United States. The lower house members expressed these remarks after they were offered explanations by top security officials about factors behind the deteriorating security situation.

A day earlier, senior security officials, including interior minister, vice chief of army staff and the spymaster, appeared before the upper house, Meshrano Jirga, and on Wednesday last before a joint commission of both houses of parliament, explaining reasons behind the growing insecurity. At today's lower house session, some lawmakers suggested that the president, the chief executive officer and security bosses should be summoned to a general session. But a lawmaker from northern Baghlan province, Obaidullah Ramin, opposed the idea, saying security officials spent much of their time

offering explanations to parliament and its commissions instead of working in their offices. He suggested security officials should be given at least three months to devise their plans on how to improve the country's security situation because these officials had newly been appointed.

Lawmaker from Samangan province, Makhdom Abadullah Mohammadi, said Afghanistan's security challenges could not be overcome by summoning security officials. Mohammad Akbari from Bamyan province said summoning officials had no benefit. "We should not waste their time by summoning them again."

Mohammad Sarwar Osmani from Farah province also held similar views, saying summoning security officials had no impact on the country's security scenario. He proposed that Afghanistan should buy weapons from China, Russia and India and bring into use all available resources. Some lawmakers insisted the security deal with Washington should be reviewed for the sake of improvement in Afghanistan's security situation. Zakria

“Where are the bosses with whom you signed the deal while clapping?”

Soda from northeastern Badakhshan province, the scene of a bloody insurgent attack recently, said Afghanistan had signed the security deal with the US in the hope that it would bring security, but the security situation had since been worsening. “That’s why the deal should be reviewed. And if the United States does not assist Afghanistan in maintaining its security after the review, the deal should be scrapped,” he said.

Soon after his inauguration in September, President Ghani signed the BSA and a separate status of forces agreement (SOFA) with NATO. The parliament approved both the agreements in November, allowing the US and NATO to keep some forces past 2014, amid a renewed offensive by the Taliban. Qurban Kohistani, a lower house member from central Ghor province, also insisted the security agreement with the US should be reviewed, believing Americans had not arrived in Afghanistan to maintain its security. “The US has come here to train terrorists against its enemies,” he said.

Obaidullah Barakzai from Uruzgan province called for the BSA to be declared null and void as soon as possible because insecurity had increased after signing the deal. “There are cries everywhere in Afghanistan. Daily fathers and mothers weep at the graves of their sons. Widows cry as they look at their children. Where are the bosses (Americans) with whom you signed the deal while clapping. You disconnected yourselves from God and the Quran and connected with infidels. Where is our spiritual father (US president Barack) Obama? He should now come and rescue us.”

Lawmaker from eastern Nangarhar province Hazrat Ali said Afghan security forces should hold serious talks with foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan on security. He asked lawmakers to stay firm on their statements because the country’s security situation was fast deteriorating. “The government should maintain security. The government says Daesh is coming. Who are Daesh (Islamic State)...they are the people who had no regard for people’s honour. They are busy beheading our people.” A number of lawmakers said a national consensus should be drawn regarding security maintenance and security officials given time to chalk out their plans. Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy said Wolesi Jirga’s commissions would discuss security issues tomorrow and would share the outcome of their discussions with the administrative board, which would then share the details with a general session for a decision.

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Email marketing@pajhwok.com

Telephone: +93 (0) 20 220 1814 or +93 (0) 20 220 1915