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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

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“We don’t understand when the elections will take place.”

Electoral reforms panel illegal, says Muslimyar Abasin Zaheer, 16 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Senate Chairman Fazl Hadi Muslimyar on Sunday said the newly-created electoral reforms commission was illegal and the national assembly would also have no legal status after late June if the parliamentary elections did not take place.

President Ashraf Ghani last month issued a decree ordering the creation of the electoral reforms commission and appointing lawmaker Shukria Barakzai as the panel’s head. But the Chief Executive Officer Office has opposed Barakzai, a female lawmaker from Kabul, as the panel head and some other members, saying it had not been consulted on the appointments. The formation of electoral reforms commission is part of the unity government deal reached between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah after last year’s disputed presidential elections.

But Muslimyar told today’s session that there was no mention of such a commission in Afghanistan’s laws. He said if the government wanted to introduce electoral reforms; it should form a commission of individuals chosen by the Selection Committee and who were not members of the election bodies. Under the law on duties, authority and composition of the election commissions, the selection committee is composed of Senate chairman, lower house speaker, chief justice, civil society activists, chief of the commission overseeing the implementation of the constitution, the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission chief and members of the election commissions. The selection commission had previously introduced 27 persons as members of the Independent Election Commission and 15 persons as members of the Electoral Complaints Commission to former president Hamid Karzai, who picked nine persons as members of the election panel and five persons as members of the watchdog.

Under Article 64 of the Constitution, the president has the authority to form commissions on administrative reforms. Muslimyar said the Constitution stipulated the parliamentary elections to be held in June and the new parliament inaugurated in July. However, he said if the elections did not take place as scheduled, the parliament would have no legal status after June 22.

He said the government was bound by the law to conduct the parliamentary elections on schedule. “People have no problem, they are ready to participate in the elections if the government paves the ground for them.” Second Vice-President Mohammad Sarwar Danish had announced few days ago that the parliamentary elections might be delayed for a year. While the election

commission chief had cited the lack of financial resources to hold the parliamentary elections on the stipulated time. Muslimyar said due to differences between the president and the CEO, violations of the country’s laws had increased multiple times. “Looking at the gravity of their rifts, we don’t understand when the elections will take place...a year after or 10 years after or never?” He said laws in Afghanistan had always been violated by the country’s leaders and people had no role in that. Earlier, presidential spokesman Ajmal Obaid Abidi had denied any differences between the president and the CEO.

3 ministers-designate presents plans to WJ Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 8 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Three ministers-designate on Wednesday presented their plans and strategies to the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) or lower house of parliament, underlining elimination of corruption, creation of opportunities for women and hiring talents on government positions.

The nominees who presented their plans included Abdul Basir Anwar, minister-designate for justice, Syed Sadat Nadari for urban development and Gulab Mangal, cabinet pick for borders and tribal affairs portfolio. Mangal said terrorism, extremism, rampant corruption, widespread poverty and existence of illegal armed men were main challenges being faced by the government. In case of getting trust vote, he would work hard to counter all challenges to bring prosperity to the country and people.

He pledged to resolve problems of tribal masses and safeguard borders of the country in a diligent manner. “I will bring some tangible changes to the policy of this ministry in order to halt smuggling activities in border areas,” the cabinet pick remarked. He promised to reorganize local councils, protect historical relics and work for the establishment of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

The minister-designate for urban development said life in Afghanistan has become tough especially in cities. He viewed repatriation of refugees, surging population and urbanization, poverty, grabbing of land, non-existence of urban laws and absence of urban development plan as major challenges. Under his administration, he would make sure strict provision of all services in cities. Syed Sadat Nadari said implementation of master plan, scrutiny of private sector involved in urban development, provision of drinking water, power and canalization system and hiring of competent individuals on key posts would among his top priorities if elected as Urban Development Minister. The minister-designate said he would ensure the completion of ongoing housing projects, encourage foreign investment for urban development and make sure

“Qadir assured some ministers-designate of voting in their favor.”

transparency and gender equality in his ministry. Abdul Basir Anwar, a cabinet pick for Justice Ministry, briefed the house about his plans. He said implementation of laws, vacation of grabbed properties from powerful individuals, reforms, capacity building, elimination of corruption and gender equality would be his priorities. He pledged in case of getting trust vote from lower house he would implement all his plans and create law institute for graduates of Shaira Faculty students where they would complete their internship programme.

Qadir under fire for meeting cabinet picks

Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 8 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some Wolesi Jirga members on Wednesday accused first deputy speaker Haji Zahir Qadir and a parliamentary group “Karwan-i-Solha” of receiving bribes from ministers-designate to award them the trust vote. Iqbal Safi, a lower house member from Kapisa province, claimed Qadir, a powerful lawmaker from eastern Nangarhar province, had invited some cabinet nominees to a meeting and assured them of voting in

their favour. He alleged Qadir had already assured the president that his cabinet picks would be awarded the trust vote. But Qadir and others spurned his allegations. Another lawmaker Shekiba Hashimi said President Ashraf Ghani had asked Qadir to ensure that his 16 cabinet nominees obtained the vote of confidence from the Wolesi Jirga this time. She disassociated herself from the Karwan-i-Solha block and told the cabinet nominees not to make payment in her name because she had parted ways with the group for accepting bribes. Qadir rejected allegations against him and said they had discussed other issues at his meeting with the ministers-designate. He said relatives of some lawmakers had been arrested in Farkhunda’s murder case and the meeting discussed how to mount pressure on the Wolesi Jirga commission investigating the case to release their relatives. He said some lawmakers had earlier come up with similar allegations against him but they failed to produce evidence in support of their claims. He promised to resign if found guilty.



National unity of paramount importance: CMSJ

Naheed Bashrdost , 9 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of civil society activists on Thursday warned that the country would plunge into crisis if differences among leaders of unity government were not bridged. The Civil Movement of Social Justice (CMSJ), a civil society institute, said differences of opinions between leaders were previously behind the doors and the people had no knowledge about them. But those differences surfaced publicly which showed that the governance would get worse if the situation was not controlled, the CMSJ warned. Ahmad Zaki, head of the CMSJ, in a meeting held in Kabul said recent statements by Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdulal about his concerns about the government were earlier realized by the people. “Abdullah who has 50 percent share in the national unity government said I am not convinced regarding performance of the government. I fear there will be no big achievement in the future too,” Zaki added. A day earlier, Abdullah in a conference about human rights said: “The government’s efforts about human rights done in the past few months were not

enough. We have already missed opportunities in this regard.” “The CEO seat is not an imaginary, ceremonial or a gift by someone,” he said. Another member of CMSJ Ghulam Mohammad Mohammadi said a political transition of the government should be more legitimate but he regretted violation of the constitution and election law during the election process. “Our demand from the leaders is that to respect the agreement they signed during the formation of the national unity government,” he said.

Divergence among leaders behind boiling insecurity: WJ

Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 11 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of Wolesi Jirga members on Saturday blamed stark differences between leaders of the unity government for a spike in deteriorated law and order.

Ghulam Hussain Naseri, Wolesi Jirga member, told the house: “Weak performance of the government and differences between President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani

“The HPC would be effective only when it shunned its inactiveness.”

and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has paved way for insecurity and rise of Daesh in the country.” “If not directly, then the government has a role in insecurity indirectly,” he added.

Abdul Latif Pedram, another lawmaker, said the president and the CEO had taken the government hostage and were locked in a sort of battle over distribution of power. “Last night, 30 people were kidnapped in Badakhshan and 10 were beheaded. This was done by Daesh group,” he claimed. Pedram warned the government was losing legitimacy since the security situation was deteriorating

on a daily basis. Babur Farahmand, a legislator from Faryab, questioned security forces’ performance in thwarting terrorist attack on Balkh province’s attorney general office. “The non-professional response of security forces to Balkh attack gave rise to casualties.”

More than 20 people were killed and 70 more wounded in Balkh attack. Wolesi Jirga Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy also expressed concerns about the ongoing law and order situation, asking the administrative board of the house to summon security officials to the house.



HPC useless in current circumstances: deputy CEO

Javed Hamim Kakar, 11 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The first deputy chief executive officer on Saturday said there was no need for the High Peace Council (HPC) in the current circumstances.

Eng. Mohammad Khan said the HPC, a government body tasked with negotiating peace with insurgents, had done nothing since the formation of the unity government six months ago. He said the body had not been involved in the ongoing peace efforts nor it was aware about details from the latest contacts in this regard. The deputy CEO said President Ashraf Ghani was taking forward the peace bid through his special representatives.

Khan said the HPC had no importance in the ongoing peace efforts. The HPC would be effective only when it shunned its inactiveness, he believed. The first deputy CEO said experienced individuals existed in the council and the government should take benefit from them in other fields. He said peace needed a trustworthy body unlike the current one. About Pakistan’s role in the ongoing peace efforts and its sincerity, Mohammad Khan said: “The time will prove how much Pakistan is sincere.” He said though Pakistan’s civil and military leaderships had repeatedly claimed their sincerity this time, some border issues and security incidents in Afghanistan brought under question Islamabad’s claims.

“President Ghani has made it clear on Pakistan that if violence in Afghanistan increased this spring, it will show

Pakistan is not sincere about peace and relations.” Khan claimed the insurgency in Afghanistan was supported by regional spy networks because the insurgents could not fight for so many years without such backing.

MPs blast govt leaders over growing insecurity

Abasin Zaheer, 12 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Meshrano Jirga on Sunday decided to hold talks with the president and the chief executive officer (ECO) on the peace process and growing insecurity after nearly 70 people were killed in four days of violence. The insurgents have stepped up attacks on government targets, killing 70 people and wounding dozens more during the last four days. Nearly half of the victims were civilians.

The Meshrano Jirga or Senate on Sunday debated security incidents in the country. Senator Mohammad Nadir Baloch from Nimroz province said differences between the government leaders had lately increased, resulting in growing insecurity in much of the country. “The political coquetry and irresponsible statements of the government’s leaders are more dangerous for Afghanistan than the Taliban and Daesh (Islamic State),” he remarked. He urged the unity government’s leaders to intensify their efforts at reversing the tide of insecurity so that the bloodshed of Afghans could be stopped. His colleague from southeastern Paktika province, Mohammad Osman Rahmani, said the Afghans had braved threats to their lives to vote for the two leaders, who had been unable to provide them security.

“The leaders have differences over matters of personal interests.”

“The nation is drowned in blood and government officials are inattentive to their responsibilities. If they fail to improve the country’s security, they are answerable to the nation and the God.” Lawmaker Rahmatullah Khan Achakzai said the unity government leaders had differences over matters of personal interests, not national. “They are after their personal benefits, why would they provide us security. The chief executive officer’s home is in India and whereabouts of the president’s home are unknown.”

CEO Abdullah’s home is in Karta-i-Parwan area of Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani is living with the first lady at the Presidential Palace. Achakzai said if the government did not fulfill its responsibilities, it would soon witness a widespread uprising against it nationwide. The Senate’s first deputy chairman, Mohammad Alam Ezedyar, said the national unity government seemed to have no political will to improve security in the country and resolve problems facing the nation. He said if the government wanted peace to prevail in the country, it should hold talks with countries supporting terrorism. Chairman Fazl Hadi Muslimyar also expressed his concern over the growing insecurity and asked the government to fulfill its responsibility in this regard.

He asked senators to hold talks with the president and the CEO over the recent wave of insecurity and the proposed peace talks with the Taliban. After his inauguration in late September, President Ghani visited Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China and the United States to muster support for reviving the stalled peace talks with the insurgents, raising hopes for peace. But the hopes later started dying as no progress could be seen in the effort to bring the rebels to the negotiating table. Lawmakers raised their hands to approve Muslimyar’s call for meeting the president and the CEO over the deteriorating security situation and the peace process. Muslimyar said time for meeting the two leaders would be sought through letters. Attempts at seeking comments from the presidential spokesman could not succeed, but the spokesman had recently denied any differences between the president and the CEO, saying the two leaders were trying to streamline the government’s affairs.

5 more cabinet picks present future plans to WJ

Abasin Zaheer, 13 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Five ministers-designate presented their plans and strategies to the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) or lower house of parliament on Monday. The nominees who presented their plans included minister-designate for commerce and industries, energy and water, communication and information technology, agriculture and livestock and economy portfolio.

Abdul Sattar Murad, a cabinet pick for the Ministry of Economy, said he would work in tandem to remove hurdles in the way of economic development and increased domestic production. He promised to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and seek support of private sector to strengthen the vital sector. He said if elected as minister he would strive hard to build close coordination among ministries and monitor projects of national importance. Murad pledged to provide all required facilities to the ministry’s departments in the

provinces and take tangible steps for eradication of corruption.

Abdul Razaq Wahidi, cabinet nominee for the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), said previous government did not work for the development of communication and technology, adding that seven percent of the national treasury was supported by revenue generated by the MCIT. He pledged to launch distribution of electronic Identity Cards if elected as minister. Wahidi recalled, currently 25 million Afghans had access to mobile and 12 million to internet services in the country. Expansion of Noori Electronic Network, improvement of internet and mobile services with low prices, develop a sense of competition among telecommunication companies, registration of SIM cards and provision of internet facility in state-run universities would be his priorities if elected as minister.

Asadullah Zamir, minister-designate for Agriculture and Livestock, said he would work out a strategy to increase agriculture products and build facilities for its storage. Addressing the lawmaker, Zamir said exploration of markets for agriculture goods, water management, introduction of better irrigation system, construction of dams, expansion of orchards, provision of quality seeds with low price, protection of forests and better relations with private sector would be his priorities. In addition, he said he would protect green belt areas of capital Kabul, create poultry farms and agriculture parks. He said if elected as minister he would provide facilities for Kochi tribe and bring necessary reforms to the ministry to eradicate growing corruption and misuse of resources.

Humayun Rasa, minister designate for the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, said if Wolesi Jirga trusted him, he would remove existing problems at the ministry. He pledged to reorganize the commerce policies, strengthen trade institutions, improve quality of goods and improve employees’ capacity building. He said investment was key for the development of economy and he would strive hard to encourage foreign and domestic investment. Rasa pledged to pay special heed to bolster domestic products and provide facilities to exporters if he was given a trust vote. “My top priority is to make the ministry more vibrant,” he added.

Ali Ahmad Osmani, minister-designate for water and energy, said bringing tangible reforms to the ministry’s administrative system would be his first job to do if he won as minister. He noted his priorities would fight corruption, attract foreign technical assistance, building power dams across the country. He would also try to get membership for Afghanistan in international organizations related to water and power. He pledged to promote journalism in the country, but did not mention what relations journalism has to the ministry of water and energy. On Wednesday, nominees for the ministries of public works, women’s affairs, education and transport are scheduled to present their future plans to the lower house. Wolesi Jirga secretary Abul Rauf Inami told Pajhwok Afghan News the minister-designate information and culture has a US nationality. He added if his second nationality is terminated then Jahani would also be allowed to present his plans to the parliament. It is pertinent to mention that the Ministry Of Defence still does not have any nominee.

“Acting officials
contributing to bad
law and order.”



Senators underline trust vote process' early completion

Abasin Zaheer, 14 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of Mesharano Jirga members on Tuesday asked Wolesi Jirga to expedite trust vote process in order to overcome uncertainty and instability in the country. Lawmakers believed the government had miserably failed to improve law and order. They underlined swift completion of cabinet so that officials could focus on their constitutionally mandated duties. It has been seven months that the unity government has been formed but the cabinet would yet to be finalized. Eight ministers had officially took over charge of their duties while the trust vote process for another 16 cabinet picks was underway in the lower house. Out of 16 ministers-designate Abdul Bari Jahani, a cabinet nominee for Information and Cultural Affairs Ministry, maintained dual citizenship and the lower house would allow him to explain his future plan once he gives up his foreign citizenship, the Wolesi Jirga administrative commission had said. Anarkali Hunaryar, a lawmaker from Khost province, raised the issue of delay in cabinet formation by saying that security and economic conditions of the country have been experiencing downward trend due to acting officials. She urged Wolesi Jirga to award vote of confident to the ministers-designate without further delay. She noted minister with poor performance should be disqualified in the future. Another lawmaker Gulali Akbari expressed similar views by saying that acting officials were contributing to bad law and order. Nabya Mustafazada, a lawmaker from Jawzjan province, urged Wolesi Jirga to expedite the trust vote's process. She noted international community would not extend financial assistance to Afghanistan in the presence of acting officials. Chairman Senate Fazzal Hadi Muslimyar said with the completion of cabinet, economic and security situation of the country would improve considerably. He urged the lower house not to delay the trust vote process. and let the cabinet to be formed soon.

Minister-designate for culture found dual citizen

Abasin Zaheer, 13 April 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Minister-designate for Information and Culture, Abdul Bari Jehani, has been found holding dual nationality, the Wolesi Jirga secretary said on Monday.

Abdul Rauf Inami told Pajhwok Afghan News they had vetted documents of all the 16 newly-introduced cabinet nominees. He said the documents of all, except Jehani, were acceptable to the national assembly until his American nationality was confirmed cancelled by the authorities concerned.

The remaining 16 ministers-designate were introduced to the lower house for a vote of confidence by the second vice president earlier this month. Inami said they had sent letters to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US Embassy in Kabul to confirm if Jehani's American nationality had been cancelled, but there was not response as yet. He said if Jehani's dual nationality was cancelled, he would be given time to share his future plans with lawmakers before being granted the trust vote. The Wolesi Jirga has decided not to vote for dual citizen cabinet nominees. So far eleven of the 16 nominees have explained their future plans to lawmakers. So far no one is nominated to head the Ministry of Defence.

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