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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

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Prosecution of fraud-tainted officials, individuals sought

Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 22 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Electoral Reforms Commission on Saturday promised submitting next week a set of suggestions based on discussions with people. Shah Sultan Akefi, head of the panel, told Pajhwok Afghan News they had collected views and suggestions from more than 1,500 people regarding elections reforms from all seven zones of the country. These people, he said, were members of civil society, political parties and legal experts. He did not go into detail, but hoped the suggestions could pave the way for parliamentary elections. According to Akefi, 90 percent of the people whose views and suggestions have been obtained said those accused of electoral fraud should be prosecuted. Akefi said currently 13 million people were eligible to vote, but 21 million voting cards had been distributed. He agreed the problem needed to be addressed. Electoral reforms are a major point of the agreement on the unity government. Some people suggested the number of polling stations should be decreases, including surge in women seats in Wolesi Jirga if possible. It would be better if election process was conducted on different days in different zones and the election commissions should be held accountable. The exemption and support to corrupt individuals in the past one decade has caused election process unprecedented damage, he said, adding that some people suggested that mixed system of election should be used. Akefi said insecurity was a biggest threat to transparent elections. "If there is no security, fraud could not be controlled," he made it clear. The Meshrano Jirga's first chairman Mohammad Alam Izdyar said ERC should have commitment for bringing reforms and transparency to electoral system. He said the election process could not be conducted in a transparent way until there was lack of political will. Izdyar stressed on distribution of computerized identity cards and said that these ID cards could ensure transparency in the election process.

Kunduz residents stress fair, transparent ballot

Hidayatullah Hamdard, 22 August 2015

KUNDUZ CITY (Pajhwok): The residents of northeastern Kunduz province demanded changes and transparency in the election system. A conference regarding suggestions of people to reform ballot was held on Saturday in Kunduz City, the provincial capital, in which over 300 persons

participated. The conference was organized by the New Line organization and Afghan Civil Society Election Network (ACSEN) aimed at collecting suggestions of people from all walks of life. Hamidullah Baloch, director of Independent Election Commission (IEC), said that holding such conferences would help bring better amendments to the election law and counter threats and violation in the election process. He said the participants stressed the IEC should provide immovable polling system which was more efficient system in the world. A number of people stressed on transparency in the election process. Fazlullah Yaqubi one of the participants, told Pajhwok Afghan News he suggested three issues including immediate distribution of computerized ID cards, transparency in election and recruitment of professional individuals in the election commissions. He stressed the commissions should not face shortage of employees during their work because shortage of employees could lead election process to face problems. Syed Rahim, a resident of Chahar Dara district, said the polls system should be changed and the election law amended. He said the election commissions should be provided with database system. The previous presidential and provincial election processes were faced problems by some powerful individuals, warlords, relatives of candidates, insecurity and fraud, he said, adding that Kunduz people want a transparent and free elections free from interference by warlords. ACSEN head Dr. Mohammad Haroon said that based on their assessment, most of the participants demanded amendments in election law and formation of election commissions. The participants were divided into eight groups and each of them had provided their own suggestions regarding reforms in the election system, he said, adding that suggestions would be shared with Kabul election commission officials. The Electoral Reforms Commission (ERC) is scheduled to share their suggestions about the reforms for the election system with the president. Shah Sultan Akefi, head of the panel, told Pajhwok Afghan News they had collected views and suggestions from more than 1,500 people regarding elections reforms from all seven zones of the country. These people, he said, were members of civil society, political parties and legal experts. He did not go into detail, but hoped the suggestions could pave the way for parliamentary elections. According to Akefi, 90 percent of the people whose views and suggestions have been obtained said those accused of electoral fraud should be prosecuted.

“Although we did not agree on composition of the electoral reforms panel, but still different agencies involved in elections tried to closely cooperate with the commission and present their suggestions.”



Above: Ballots on Election Day. Kabul, Afghanistan.

‘Electoral related suggestions be considered minutely’

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 24 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Democracy and Elections Committee on Monday said the Electoral Reforms Commission should share their suggestions to the agencies related to elections, before submitting it to the government. The electoral reforms panel embarked on its work last month and would submit its suggestions to the government in the next week that contains suggestion for reforms from agencies related to elections and people's suggestions. Democracy and Elections Committee headed by Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) has welcomed the work done by the electoral commission so far. It said before its suggestions go to the government they should be shared with elections-related agencies so that they get the assurance that all suggestions have been taken into consideration. Discrediting the previous voting cards, work on new cards distribution, preparing list of voters before any elections and providing appropriate and effective plan in a short time would reportedly comprise the first set of suggestions that the panel would present. Introducing an answerable mechanism for the members of the elections commissions and responsibilities of the committee that selects members of the elections commissions would be other suggestions of the panel. The Democracy and Elections Committee also urged the government to seriously consider suggestions of the electoral reforms commission and pave way for their implementation. Naeem Ayubzada, TEFA head, told journalists in Kabul in the past ten months the issue of elections was delayed and it wasn't a top priority for the government. "Although we did not agree on composition of the electoral reforms panel, but still different agencies involved in elections tried to closely cooperate with the commission and present their suggestions to be of great technical help for the panel," he remarked. But Ayubzada voiced concerns that differences among the panel's members had hindered the first set of suggestions to be finalised. TEFA head said one of the suggestions of the panel should be to specify the fate of the elections commissions' commissioners. "We want changes in structure, individuals, mechanisms and legal framework not only for Kabul but also for provinces. These suggestions should

be presented by the reforms panel and the leaders should take decision on it." According to the Democracy and Elections Committee, the electoral reforms commission did not have authority to take decisions about the fate of election commission's members and the government should announce its stance about this matter. Ayubzada said given the current situation in the country, the dates for parliamentary and district council elections should be specified soon.

Nangarhar PC welcomes president's shake-up plan

Zeeraq Fahim, 25 August 2015

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Provincial Council (PC) members on Tuesday welcomed President Ashraf Ghani's proposed changes in the administration of eastern Nangarhar province and urged him to appoint qualified and deserving individuals. Reports say the Presidential Palace is planning to remove more than 10 provincial departmental heads and replace them with honest and qualified individuals. President Ghani was expected to arrive in Jalalabad, the provincial capital, but bad weather forced him to cancel his trip. The Nangarhar PC members told reporters they wanted changes in the provincial administration by removing corrupt and unqualified people and that was why they welcomed the president's decision in this regard. PC member Zabihullah Zamarai said: "We want reforms in the administrative system and want to see honest, patriotic and educated people on key posts." He said the province had become insecure after militants stepped up their activities in the Shinwari zone. He asked the central government to reverse the tide of insecurity in the province and dismantle insurgent hideouts. The public representative also said they wanted the words "Afghan and Islam" to be mentioned in the computerized national identity (ID) cards. Zamarai said drastic reforms needed in every department particularly security and governance. He said Taliban militants used to flee areas during operations and stage a comeback after security forces conclude their offensives. The council's deputy head, Dr. Nasir Kamawal, said the security situation in Nangarhar was not good and Taliban militants got strengthened with each passing day. He said many families in the Shinwari district had suffered due to the infighting between militant groups.

“The major challenge for security is lack of enough forces on city and district levels.”



Above: The Democracy and Elections Committee at a presser. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Poor coordination linked to growing Herat insecurity

Storai Karimi, 18 August 2015

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Lack of access to modern security facilities and coordination among security forces were main reasons behind dramatic surge in insecurity in western Herat province, an official said on Tuesday. Abdul Rahman Pedram, security and districts committee head in Herat provincial council, expressed these views in an interview with Pajhwok Afghan News. He said security committee was formed after insecurity started to rise in the province. “Before I took over as head of the committee, everything was on paper and no practical steps had been taken towards security.” He held regular meetings with security organs, and conveyed security concerns of districts’ residents to the governor and other relevant officials. “The major challenge for security is lack of enough forces on city and district levels. Lack of access to modern technical security facilities and lack of coordination among security organs is another challenge,” he added. “Herat’s security gates are specified. If our security forces have access to modern technology by installing CCTV cameras and other facilities they could secure the city in a better way,” he continued. Regarding infrastructural projects, Pedram said, they did not have any decision in giving contracts but the contracts were given to firms in Kabul. He said sometimes the firms came and started work in Herat and did not feel the need to answer to local authorities.

Zabul lawmaker escapes unhurt in Taliban’s ambush

Nasim hotak, 25 August 2015

QALAT (Pajhwok): Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament member Hamidullah Tokhi escaped unhurt in Taliban’s attack in southern Zabul province on Tuesday, but one of his guards was killed and two others wounded, an official said. Governor Spokesman Gul Islam Syal told Pajhwok Afghan News the attack was carried out in the limits of Shah-i-Safa district on Zabul-Kandahar road. The lawmaker’s son Abdul Wasi confirmed his father survived Taliban’s ambush, but one of his bodyguards had been killed and two others wounded in gunfire. The injured, he said were instantly shifted to the hospital who were said

to be in stable condition. Taliban have yet to comment on the incident.

Ghazni governor accused of meeting Daesh leaders

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 25 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Accusing the governor of southern Ghazni province of having hands with Taliban, civil society organizations alleged that he had a meeting with Daesh leaders twice in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). But Governor Musa Akbarzada rejected the allegations as groundless. Some civil society activists and Ghazni lawmakers in parliament expressed concerns about spike in kidnappings and insecurity in the province. They alleged that routes leading to Jaghori, Malestan, Nawar, Jaghato and Qara Bagh districts had turned deadly. Ali Akbar Qasemi, a lawmaker from Ghazni, said majority of Ghazni districts were under insurgents’ control and the government had no writ there. He has repeatedly informed the government about the plight of the people, but to no avail. He alleged Ghazni governor had hands with insurgents in the province and had secret meetings with Daesh leaders in UAE. He said Gen. Yasin, an official of National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Abdul Wahid Qaderi, the governor’s advisor who are in custody had also accompanied him in these trips. He alleged they have also taken \$200,000 allowance from the government for their trips. “Allowing Taliban for firing rockets and seizure of suicide belts from governor’s office are ample proofs that the governor has hands with Taliban,” he continued. Mohammad Shafiq Nang, the governor’s spokesman, rejected the allegations. “The governor has no hand with the insurgents. He has no meeting with any of Daesh leaders in UAE or any other country.” The civil society activists also issued a statement that the government was unable to secure highways they should provide residents with weapons to ensure their own security. “The Ghazni governor should be sacked immediately and replaced by someone who is not a Taliban sympathizer. The police chief should take drastic measures to ensure law and order,” added the statement. The governor’s spokesperson said only Nawar district faced security challenges while rests of the districts were safe.

“The Ghazni governor should be sacked immediately and replaced by someone who is not a Taliban sympathizer.”



Above: Abdul Rahman Pedram, Herat provincial council member.

New system introduced for transparency in judicial cases

Storai Karimi, 25 August 2015

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): An electronic system preventing corruption and keep transparency in cases of convicts has been activated in western Herat province, an official said Tuesday. The program, launched by Afghanistan Justice Sector Support Program (JSSP), was begun three years ago in judicial organs and police headquarters of Herat province but was formally inaugurated today. Samiuddin Rahin, head of Herat appellate attorney, during the inauguration ceremony said the electronic system would help register all criminal cases from detection of a crime to punishing the criminal. He said that preventing corruption, keeping transparency in criminal cases, addressing cases on time, observing criminals' rights and managing all documents in judicial organs were the facilities that the new system provides. Rahin said: "In the past, we were using old system which took long time to address cases, but the new system offers more transparency, prevent corruption and address cases on time." This system would be activated throughout the country to ensure transparency in judicial organs. Provincial appeal court head Sayed Abdul Ghaffar Zubair told Pajhwok Afghan News that in the past relatives and friends of convicts and media did not access to complete information about a case but now they can have access through their website and see the operations of judicial organs, attorneys and police. This service can also inform judicial officials in the central government about their operations, Zubair added. Herat court has addressed 4,000 cases including murders, kidnap, violence against women, harassing and torturing, sexual assaults and armed robbery cases from the start of this year, he said.

Governors form body to help improve governance

Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 18 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Former and current governors on Tuesday announced forming association called "Afghanistan Governors Association (AGA) to help the government ensure good governance and banish administrative corruption. Former Kabul governor Abdul Jabbar Taqwa, who heads the association, said current and former governors had the association's membership. He said the body would independently work and would

also reach out to the masses to muster their support. He said the ex-governors would hold seminars to help the government in eliminating corruption and bad governance. Tawqa said powers largely remained centralised during the past 14 years with governors facing multiple problems in discharging their duties. He warned the gap between the centre and provinces would widen if the powers remained centralised. Mohammad Iqbal Azizi, a former governor of central Logar and the AGA spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News currently 65 former and 15 incumbent governors had the membership of the association. He said the ex-governors were qualified and had enough experience in terms of governance and government officials could get valuable tips from them to ensure good governance in their provinces. Mohammad Nader Yama, deputy director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), acknowledged problems and restrictions on provincial governments. He said a new policy for local governance had been prepared and it would be presented before the Council of Ministers next month for approval. Deputy Senate Chairman Mohammad Alim Ezediyar announced his support for the AGA and said the association's efforts would help improve governance.

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