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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

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“We look forward to a credible, inclusive and transparent electoral reform process.”

Electoral reforms panel chief, members appointed

Mohammad Asif Ahmadzai, 16 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Ashraf Ghani has appointed a 14-member special Electoral Reforms Commission including the panel's chief, the Presidential Palace said on Thursday. A statement from the palace said the commission was aimed at bringing fundamental reforms to the country's electoral system to ensure free, fair and inclusive elections, strengthen democracy and increase people's trust in the system and prevent fraud. The special electoral reforms commission was created through a presidential decree, the statement said. Sultan Shah Akefi has been appointed as the commission chief and Sediqullah Tawhidi as his deputy. Other members of the panel include Kawoon Kakar, Mohammad Ali Amiri, Abdul Qadir Karyab, Bashir Farooq, Asadullah Sadati, Faizullah Zaki, Saleh Mohammad Registani, Shah Mahmoud Miakhel, Sabrina Saqib, Dr. Alima. Abdul Majid Ghanizada, representative of the Ministry of Justice and Tadamichi Yamamoto, representative of the United Nations in Afghanistan have also been appointed as members of the commission. Earlier, the president had appointed lawmaker Shukria Barakzai as the electoral commission chief, a decision strongly opposed by the Chief Executive Office.

Electoral reform panel an important step: UN

Halim Karimi, 19 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has welcomed the establishment of the Electoral System Reform Commission by the unity government under the chairmanship of Sultan Shah Akefi. "This is an important step," said Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. In a statement, the UNAMA head said: "We look forward to a credible, inclusive and transparent electoral reform process." He said UNAMA encouraged the Afghan authorities to make

the necessary decisions on the electoral calendar for the next parliamentary and other polls. The mission also acknowledged the nomination of Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN secretary-general's deputy special representative for Afghanistan to the commission. The statement said the UN would not be a voting-member of the commission, but to provide advice and technical expertise based on international best practices, while respecting the sovereign right of Afghanistan to make the final decisions on electoral reforms. Yamamoto is the United Nations' focal point for electoral support to Afghanistan and will coordinate international assistance to the Electoral System Reform Commission. "Electoral reforms are essential to restoring the faith of the Afghan people in the democratic process and will lead to greater political stability," said Yamamoto.

President appoints 19 new advisors

Javed Hamim Kakar, 14 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Under a special decree, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has appointed 19 new advisors on different positions, a statement by the Presidential Palace says on Tuesday. According to the statement, 19 persons were appointed as president's advisors under the article of 64th of the constitution in different positions. Abdul Hai Niamati was appointed as advisor counternarcotics, Saleh Mohammad Safari borders and tribal affairs, Nabi Misdaq and Haji Fazal Karim media affairs, Agha Lalai Dastgiri and Mohammad Ali Sadat disputes' solution cases, Asadullah Sayed tribal affairs, Ahmadullah Alizai local governance, Khyal Mohammad Hussaini and Eid Mohammad Ahmadi social affairs and Haji Najibullah Nasar border affairs. Other advisors included Ali Ahmad Jawand, advisor to president on private sector, Sayed Mohammad Ali Javed on religious affairs, Shamim Katawzai on youth affairs and Haji Alam Gul Kochai on nomads affairs. According to another presidential decree, Eng. Abdul Qayyum Khan as advisor to information and telecommunication.

“The commission’s main responsibility is to suggest electoral reforms. The commission’s doors are open to all organisations.”



Above: Presidential Palace. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Electoral reform panel not independent: watchdogs

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 20 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Election observers on Monday welcomed the establishment of the Electoral Reform Commission, but feared the panel's independence as the majority of its members were affiliated with both leaders of the unity government. Electoral reforms are a major point of the unity government agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah. Four months back, lawmaker Shukria Barakzai was appointed by President Ghani to head the electoral reform panel but faced disapproval from the CEO. On the eve of Eid, President Ghani through a decree established the commission and appointed its members. According to the decree, Shah Sultan Akefi is the head, Sediqullah Tawhidi his deputy, Kawoon Kakar, Mohammad Ali Amiri, Abdul Qadeer Karyab, Bashir Farooq, Asadullah Sadati, Faizullah Zaki, Saleh Mohammad Regestani, Shah Mahmood Mia Khail, Sabrina Saqeb, Dr. Alema, Abdul Majid Ghanizada and Tadamichi Yamamoto are members of the panel. Javed Faisal, the CEO's deputy spokesman, said both leaders of the unity government had complete agreement over the panel's composition. He admitted the panel comprised representatives of the both leaders but said it also represented civil society and the UN. "The commission's main responsibility is to suggest electoral reforms. The commission's doors are open to all organisations to share their suggestions." Election watchdogs welcomed the creation of the commission, but said they are not entirely optimistic about necessary reforms. They say the commission is politicized as its members are not independent and lack technical expertise. Naeem Ayubzada, the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) chief, told Pajhwok Afghan News that what concerned them were political affiliations, lack of experience, technical expertise and under-representation of women and independent observers in the panel. He noted electoral reforms were itself a political process, but needed legal and technical expertise. Mohammad Yousef

Rashid, executive head of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), welcomed the commission, but said the majority of its members were affiliated to both leaders of the government. He said the panel should work in coordination with elections commissions and civil society in order to bring about inclusive reforms and put to an end the public distrust over the electoral process. Asadullah Sadati, a member of the reform commission, said the panel would work independently and impartially. He said the commission would start its work this week.

Wolesi Jirga members scold absent colleagues **Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 20 July 2015**

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Wolesi Jirga on Monday could not hold its general session because a majority of the lawmakers were absent. Some lawmakers, who attended the session, lashed out at their absent colleagues, saying the house could not pass bills that had landed in the house earlier. One of them, Maulvi Abdul Rahman Rahmani from northeastern Badakhshan province said the lower house could not proceed with a defined program during Ramadan and today's session might be the last one as summer vacations were approaching. He said security issues continued to haunt lawmakers and the Defence Ministry and the Attorney General Office continued to be run by acting officials. The summer recess is scheduled to begin from July 23 till early September. Shinkai Karokhel, a lawmaker from Kabul province, also expressed her annoyance over the disappearance of most of lawmakers and said that the public representatives must ensure their presence in the house to raise concerns of their people. She said some lawmakers had traveled to their native provinces and others had gone on foreign trips and the remaining did not appear at today's session knowing that the parliament would rise for the summer break in two days. Haji Nazir Ahmad, second deputy speaker, said three commissions of the house in their meetings had discussed the possibility of postponing the summer recess. He urged colleagues to attend important sessions in which essential drafts could be approved.

“Since I took office, coordination among local departments has improved, which has a positive impact on the security situation.”



Above: A voter on Election-Day. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Paktia governor vows to sack 'unfit' officials

Sahel Mangal, 21 July 2015

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): The governor of southeastern Paktia province on Tuesday said some officials in local departments had been appointed on the basis of nepotism despite unfit for the jobs. Nasratullah Arsala, who assumed office two months back, was talking to Pajhwok Afghan News in an exclusive interview. Arsala said since taking office he had evaluated the performance of local departments and officials. His evaluation found absent coordination among some departments and employees without required skills and capacity. The governor said some individuals had been appointed on nepotism basis, paving the way for administrative corruption. Arsala was planning to sack some of these employees and reshuffle others to bring about positive changes in administrative affairs. According to him, some 500 job vacancies in local departments have been announced and would be filled through open competition. "The ongoing development projects are insufficient, I will try to start more development and reconstruction projects," he said, adding that construction work on the Machalgho dam had been stopped for several reasons and he would try to resume work on the key project. Five years ago, the Water and Energy Ministry awarded contract for construction of the dam to a joint Russo-Afghan company and only 20 percent of its work has been completed. Arsala said apart from some localities in Samkanai district, other districts had better security. "Since I took office, coordination among local departments has improved, which has a positive impact on the security situation." In the past, he recalled, gunmen would harass passengers on highways and that problem had been resolved. The governor said he had started meetings with elders, civil society activists and residents to consult them on matters relating to the province's affairs. Arsala replaces Juma Khan Hamdard, who had been Paktia governor for almost nine years.

Senate stresses unity between govt leaders, ex president

Khawaja Basir Ahmad, 14 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): KABUL (Pajhwok): Some members of Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament on Tuesday urged government leaders and former president Hamid Karzai to shun their differences and work in unity in larger

national interest. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah on Monday said the government has inherited majority of problems from previous government. "They were responding to major problems with a smile or a joke. Today they plan, pray, talk and preach for fall of this government," Abdullah remarked at a gathering in Badakhshan province. "Those who dreamt for a fall of the current government should know that alternative is either Daesh or Taliban," Abdullah noted. Senator Zalmai Zabuli addressing today's session, said: "Instead of leading people, the president, the CEO and Karzai criticize each other and this is not for the benefit of the country." "Abdullah criticizes Ashraf Ghani and Karzai, Karzai criticizes the government and says it is about to fall," he rued. "Get together and go to these elders to put aside their differences. Because differences between the government's leaders and former president will only strengthen enemy's hands," he added. Mohammad Alam Ezedyar, first deputy chairman, said: "I think last government also had achievements and short-comings. But this is not the solution to put all the blame on previous government." "The current government is responsible to deal with the existing problems," he continued. Senate chairman Fazel Hadi Muslimyar, while criticizing the unity government leaders said: "Thirteen years ago, there was nothing in this government. No force, no administration and no assembly, now there is a framework for you that requires proper management." He also urged all leaders to put aside their differences and work jointly to face challenges boldly.

Logar airstrike perpetrators be tried: MPs

Halim Karimi, 21 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some senators on Tuesday strongly condemned Monday's airstrike by American forces on an Afghan National Army (ANA) outpost in central Logar province, calling it intentional and demanded the perpetrators' prosecution. Local officials said eight ANA troops were killed and another half a dozen were wounded in the early morning airstrike involving two US helicopters in the Baraki Barak district. President Ashraf Ghani, expressing his deep concern over the incident, appointed a delegation to investigate the incident. Ghani insisted foreign troops should exercise utmost care during their operations to avoid harming Afghan forces and civilians. The US forces in Afghanistan said in a

“Some Nangarhar lawmakers in the National Assembly are interfering in the province’s affairs.”

statement that they had initiated an investigation into the incident. “We deeply regret the loss of Afghan National Army soldiers in this incident.” Some Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament members condemned the incident during Tuesday’s general session and called for the perpetrators to be punished. Chairman Fazl Hadi Muslimyar said the incident was forgivable had it occurred on the battlefield, but it hit a permanent outpost hoisting

the national flag. “American forces had also come under insider attacks, but the Americans had killed them instantly. We want the same reaction,” he remarked. First deputy chairman Mohammad Alam Ezedyar said the reason behind the incident, the third of its kind, was not clear as yet. He added the latest incident should be thoroughly investigated.



Above: Newly-appointed governor for Paktia province

‘Some MPs meddling in Nangarhar affairs’

Zeerak Fahim, 16 July 2015

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): The Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament complaints commission has accused some lawmakers from eastern Nangarhar province of meddling in the province’s administrative affairs. Zalmi Zabuli, the commission’s head, and six other senators on Wednesday visited Nangarhar where they assessed security related problems and the performance of local departments. The commission found that insecurity in some districts, problems in the education sector and the lack of sufficient police personnel were main problems the Nangarhar administration faced. Zabuli told local officials and residents: “Our investigations show some media outlets in Kabul and some lawmakers from Nangarhar are portraying a negative image of the security situation in the province.” “Some Nangarhar lawmakers in the National Assembly are interfering in the province’s affairs,” he added, without naming anyone. Zabuli said security in Nangarhar was generally better and insecurity remained in some districts. “Problems exist in some departments. We have asked officials, elders and civil society members in Nangarhar to visit Kabul after Eid and we’ll convey their grievances to the government officials concerned.” Another member of the delegation, Lotfullah Baba, told Pajhwok Afghan News residents of some districts suffered due infighting between illegal armed groups. Governor Salim Khan Kunduzi did not deny insecurity in the province and said government’s writ prevailed in all the districts and no district was in danger of falling. “We shared some of our problems with the delegation and assured them that even in insecure areas police have been able to provide security for residents.”

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