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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

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Electoral reform panel officially starts work

Muhammad Hassan Khetab, 22 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): As the Electoral Reform Commission formally started its work on Wednesday, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah said the panel would not be symbolic because the unity government was committed to electoral reforms. 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 the CEO disagreed with her appointment. On the eve of Eid, President Ghani through a decree established the commission and appointed its members. 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. Addressing the panel's maiden meeting, Abdullah said the past 14 years experience showed the Afghan people wanted electoral reforms on a priority basis and launching its work by the commission was a major step in this regard. He said the unity government had a strong political will to introduce electoral reforms and the commission's work would not be symbolic. Abdullah said the commission started its work late and urged its members to work hard in order to compensate the lost time. He hoped the commission would finish its task in a timely manner. Assuring government's full support to the panel, the CEO said the panel failed in achieving its objects, it would not only be detrimental to the commission itself but to the entire nation. The commission's head said they would make every effort possible to ensure accuracy and impartiality in their work. "We believe that the electoral reform commission is not supposed to work for a particular individual, group or party, but to bring necessary reforms in the electoral system for the sake of transparent future elections," Shah Sultan Akefi added. Earlier, election observers had welcomed the establishment of the electoral reform commission, but they were skeptical about its independence, saying the majority of its members were affiliated with both leaders of the unity government. Akefi said they would try and listen to views from different segments of society and even leaders of the government to incorporate them in reforms. He said they would also study international experiences and would take them into consideration in the reforms process. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's deputy special representative for Afghanistan and a member of the commission, said UNAMA was proud to be part of the

panel and considered it a major step toward regaining people's trust over the electoral process in Afghanistan. "We believe the commission would utilise this opportunity well and with its efforts would make the electoral process very strong," he added. Yamamoto said UNAMA's role in the commission would be advisory and would not have the right to vote despite attending all the meetings.

Elections sans reforms meaningless: Reform panel

Muhammad Hassan Khetab, 23 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Electoral Reform Commission on Thursday said holding parliamentary elections before bringing reforms to the system would be meaningless. Speaking to reporters here, Sidiqullah Tawhidi, the panel's deputy head, said the commission was not an advisory body and that its members had been divided into two groups. The first group would recommend amendments to the election law and the second would work on the structure, responsibilities and powers of electoral bodies. He said members of the commission would introduce new ways on how to prevent fraud and rigging in parliamentary, presidential, provincial and district council elections. Earlier, the Electoral Reform Commission formally started its work on Wednesday, when Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah said the panel would not be a symbolic body because the unity government remained committed to electoral reforms. Electoral reforms are a major point of the US-brokered agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah on a national unity government. Four months back, lawmaker Shukria Barakzai was appointed by President Ghani to head the electoral reform panel but the CEO disagreed with her appointment. On the eve of Eid, President Ghani decreed establishing the commission and appointing its members. 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. Akefi promised they would try and listen to views from different segments of society and even leaders of the government to incorporate them in reforms. Tadamichi Yamamoto, UN Secretary-General's deputy special representative for Afghanistan and a member of the commission, said UNAMA was proud to be part of the panel and considered it a major step toward restoring people's trust in the electoral process. "We believe the commission would utilise this opportunity well and with its efforts would make the electoral process very strong," Yamamoto said.

“ We examine all conditions for nomination of election commissioners and add cases in the law to guarantee their neutrality.”



Above: First session of Electoral Reforms Commission. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Suggestions for electoral reforms to be presented soon: Tawhidi

Muhammad Hassan Khetab, 28 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The electoral reforms commission on Tuesday reassured to evaluate all conditions for which election commissioners got nominated and would incorporate changes to the laws in order to ensure neutrality during elections. The electoral reforms commission was formed following a presidential decree and officially started work last week. The panel is headed by Shah Sultan Akefi. Sediqullah Tawhidi, the commission's deputy chairperson, told journalists that in the past few days the commission has developed work plans and ways to obtain suggestions from civil society, major political figures, youth associations and women's rights organizations. He added next week some members of the panel would travel to seven parts of the country in order to collect suggestions from civil society, local elders, Ulama councils and other segments of society in line with electoral reforms. According to Tawhidi, they would complete a set of short-term plans for electoral reforms and submit them to the government after a month. Tawhidi said the government then would have the opportunity to incorporate the set of suggestions in the laws on structure, duties and authorities of the electoral commissions through a legislative decree. "After this stage, we will start our evaluations over the structure and capacity of elections commissions and at this moment the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) will be prepared to declare the dates for the next parliamentary and district council elections," he noted. "We examine all conditions for nomination of commissioners in elections commission. We will try to add cases in the law to guarantee the neutrality of the high-ranking officials," he continued. Legal obstacles would be developed in order to prevent

any elections commissioner or other officials to prevent them from working for a particular candidate or work for one during elections period, he noted. Issuing voters list and electronic identity cards, Tawhidi concluded, would also be discussed in the electoral reforms commission.

Halim appointed as Supreme Court Chief Justice

Javed Hamim Kakar, 27 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has appointed Syed Yousuf Halim, a member of the Supreme Court Council, as chief justice of the country, an official said on Monday. Wishing anonymity, an apex court official confided to Pajhwok Afghan News the president announced his decision during a visit to the Supreme Court. Earlier, the government introduced Sayed Yousuf Halim and Anisa Rasouli to the Wolesi Jirga as member of the Supreme Court Council. Of 193 lawmakers present during the session, 103 voted in favour of the proposed member, who needed 96 ballots for confirmation. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah also confirmed the appointment of Halim as chief justice. He told the Council of Ministers the new judge would soon take charge of office. Abdullah urged Halim to discharge his duties efficiently and in the best interest of the nation. Son of Said Hussain, Prof. Halim was born in 1959 in Nangarhar province. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Law and Political Science from the Kabul University. Halim got his masters in general politics from Islamic Azad University of Iran. He joined the Ministry of Justice in 1985 and held various posts. He recently served as deputy minister of justice. He has visited several countries and participated in short-term workshops for capacity-building. He also received a number of awards during his career.

“ I’m planning to evaluate the departments in Daikundi and tackle major issues on priority basis.”



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

All resources to be utilized for Daikundi development: Muradi

Hadi Ghafari, 27 July 2015

BAMYAN (Pajhwok): The female governor for central Daikundi province on Monday pledged to work out a comprehensive strategy to resolve problems and challenges of all sectors with the extended cooperation of other departments. The Independent Directorate of Local Governance introduced Masooma Muradi as Daikundi governor last month but she resumed her work after a delay due to protests by some lawmakers. In her exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, Muradi said she would leave no stone unturned for the development of Daikundi. She added Daikundi was one of the most deprived provinces in the country. "I'm planning to evaluate the departments and tackle major issues on priority basis with the help of government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)," she added. During the last two days, she has found many administrative departments in provincial capital and districts did not have any building. She promised to bring about positive changes in the lives of people with the help and cooperation of the local residents. "There was some opposition in the beginning, but this is a society's right to agree or disagree regarding some issues. In a democratic government the people have the right to express their agreement or disagreements." Muradi said even those elders that had expressed disagreement over appointment would work in brining the province out of the trouble. Nasrullah Sadeqzizada, lawmaker from Daikundi, complained the government did not pay heed to their requests and had imposed the new governor on them. He said the lawmakers and residents had erected tents, protesting appointing of the governor but the government did not attend their requests. "We were opposed to the appointment because women cannot work in the Afghan society due to problems. We wanted somebody who could actually work for us. Zahra Bakhtyari, a women's rights activist, said women could have strong role in all sectors. "Women in Daikundi face a lot of challenges and it's natural that the new governor understand those problems better." Bakhtyari said women could actually work better than men in some sectors. The new Daikundi governor has a master's degree in management from a private university. She has previously worked as monitoring and evaluation advisor for Independent Election Commission

(IEC), gender advisor for ministry of urban development, lecturer at private universities and advisor to World Bank on governance.

Mafia groups behind spiraling insecurity in Kunduz: Safi

Hidayatullah Hamdard, 27 July 2015

KUNDUZ (Pajhwok): The governor of northern Kunduz province has said on Monday mafia circles are major obstacles to construction and security in the province. Mohammad Omar Safi, while presenting report of his first 6-months activities in office said lack of proper planning by the previous government, presence of Taliban and illegal armed men and drug smuggling were major reasons of insecurity in the province. He has submitted a set of suggestions to the government. During his period in office, he has been busy tackling e security issues. He said despite having long-term plans for development and reconstruction, certain groups did not let them do their work properly. Since beginning of the year, security situation has deteriorated in the province with Taliban gaining grounds in some areas resulted in displacement of more than 18,000 families. The governor complained he could not implement the urban master plan for Kunduz city due to interferences by mafia circles and some powerful individuals in the province. He did not name anybody but said if the government took coordinated action against them security would be restored in Kunduz. While taking office, Safi had promised construction of railways, power supply, asphaltting of roads, extension of the airport, implementation of the urban master plan for Kunduz city, and construction of the Sher Khan Port residential township. Amruddin Wali, deputy provincial council head, said what has been done so far by the government was not satisfactory. "Kunduz residents suffer from the conflicts and the government should focus more on security and later on development as well." Mohammad Amin, a local elder, said unless security was ensured there would be no chance for reconstruction efforts. He said Dasht-i-Archi district and Gortapa locality was in control of Taliban and people were getting killed for different reasons there. "Kunduz residents do not need any construction or development. Their only need currently is security." The governor said illegal gunmen were the roots for all problems in the province and without controlling them no security would be ensured.

“The provincial council head has pocketed six million afghanis and there is no clue where the money has gone.”



Above: The newly-appointed governor for central Daikundi province.

Jirga formed to resolve Kandahar education problems

Bashir Ahmad Naded, 28 July 2015

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): An advisory mini-jirga involving university teachers, civil society activists and media representatives has been formed to voluntarily work with the education department to improve teaching standards in southern Kandahar province.

The 11-member jirga on Tuesday called on Governor Dr. Humayun Aziz at the governor's house, where Education Director Abdul Qadir Piwaston was also present. The meeting decided that the jirga would oversee the education process and would work jointly with the education department in finding solution to problems plaguing the sector, said Samim Khpalwak, the governor's spokesman. He said the jirga would meet after every 15 days and would try to address hurdles crippling the education process. More than 100 schools have been closed across Kandahar province due to insecurity amid complaints about the lack of professional teachers, corruption and several other problems. Education Director Abdul Qadir Piwaston acknowledged these problems and hoped the newly-formed jirga would help bring about reforms for the sake of improvement in the education process. Provincial council chief and a member of the mini-jirga, Haji Syed Jan Khakrezwal, said besides all spheres, the current and past conflicts had caused severe damages to the education sector as well. He said more than 100 schools had been shut due to insecurity and other problems and the operational schools faced numerous problems. The jirga would help identify and resolve problems keeping low the education standard. Governor Azizi thanked the jirga for voluntarily working to bring about reforms and improvement in the education sector. He urged the jirga to identify individuals interfering in the education process for their personal benefits. He asked the education director to respect the law and identify powerful individuals who created problems for the education sector.

Kunduz PC head pockets 6m afs, claims governor

Hidayatullah Hamdard, 22 July 2015

KUNDUZ CITY (Pajhwok): The governor of northern Kunduz province on Wednesday accused the provincial council chief of embezzling six million afghanis, an

allegation the council head rejected as baseless. Speaking to journalists, Governor Mohammad Omar Safi said the money had been allocated by the Department for Disaster Preparedness for rehabilitation of calamity-hit residents of Imam Sahib district. "The provincial council head has pocketed six million afghanis and there is no clue where the money has gone," he claimed. The governor said when they sent a delegation to enquire about the money, the provincial council head and his colleagues staged protests against him. Last week, some residents staged a protest demonstration, accusing the governor of failing to ensure security and demanded his resignation. According to the governor, there were problems which could not be addressed over the past 14 years in Kunduz, where illegal armed and mafia groups remained major sources of insecurity. Mohammad Yousuf Ayubi, the provincial council head, denied the governor's claim as baseless and asked him to produce evidence in support of his allegation. "The governor always raises such false claims against the provincial council. His allegation is pure lie. We, the representatives of people, monitor government's performance and our protest was against the problems in the province," he added. He said if the government proved his claims, he was ready to stand trial. Mir Aqa Etibar, the Disaster Preparedness director, expressed his unawareness about any embezzlement in the assistance, which he said had been used through his department.

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