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Newsletter

Your weekly news update on the electoral process in Afghanistan

July 30 – August 06, 2015

“Some members of reform panel would travel to seven parts of the country in order to collect suggestions.”

Electoral reform commission seeks suggestions

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 30 July 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): In a bid to ensure transparency in the election, the electoral reform commission on Thursday said the government was committed to bring drastic reforms to the election system to ensure free, fair and transparent ballot, the commission chief said on Thursday. The commission has formally begun getting suggestions from political parties, civil society organizations, women rights activist and international stakeholders regarding reforms to the electoral system. Shah Sultan Akefi said the commission wanted to make the process transparent and the government was committed to bring reforms to the body. Earlier, the electoral reforms commission 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 chairman, told journalists earlier that in 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 people of all walks of life.

Test computerised ID cards' distribution on 19th

Zarghona Salehi, 03 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)'s office on Monday said the distribution of computerised national identity cards would begin in two weeks. The distribution of electronic ID cards was earlier scheduled to begin before last year's presidential election, but it had to be delayed for some reasons. The distribution of ID cards is a joint project of the ministries of interior and telecommunications and information technology. A contract for the project had been signed five years ago. Mujibur Rahman Rahimi, spokesman for CEO Abdullah

Abdullah's office, announced that the distribution of computerised ID Cards would begin in two weeks. He told reporters the ministries concerned had submitted their plans to the Council of Ministers with regard to the distribution of new ID cards. Rahimi said the Council of Ministers on Monday decided to launch a test distribution process on Aug. 19. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) would be responsible for the process. He said as many as 369 ID cards would be issued in the initial stage before expanding the process nationwide in the second stage. The CEO office spokesman lamented the absence of computerised ID in past last elections, but said coming elections would be conducted with the new computerised cards which would help prevent rigging. On the Home tab, check out Styles to access any text format you see in this document. For example, this paragraph uses Normal style. On the Home tab, check out Styles to access any text format you see in this document. For example, this paragraph uses Normal style.

Khost PC pledges to build close coordination among provincial depts.

Mohammad Haroon, 04 August 2015

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): The members of provincial council in southeastern Khost province have said that they utilize all resources to build coordination among provincial departments for good governance, implementation of law, and building peace in the area, a statement said on Tuesday. Provincial council member expressed these views in a monthly meeting with Governor Hukam Khan Habibi where they pledged to leave no stone unturned to resolve problems of people of this strategically important province. "All members of provincial council completely support civilian and military organs for sustainability of peace and implementation of law," they added. The governor appreciated the efforts PC members for their cooperation in improving the livelihood of people. "PC members are elected representatives of their communities and they can play pivotal role in sustainability of peace and banish bad customs from the society," the governor said. Mohammad Zaman, a PC member, said that their area needed development and they would share all problems of the communities with provincial departments for early settlement.

“The panel would not be a symbolic body because the unity government remained committed to electoral reforms.”



Above: Electronic ID card sample

‘Tangible reforms to make electoral system more efficient’

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 01 August 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): The election reform commission reassured that after introducing reforms in the country's electoral system neither the president nor the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) would be able to hire or fire election commissioners. Sadiqullah Tawhidi, the commission's deputy head, told reporters on Saturday that existing election law had several problems and two separate committees had been tasked to work on these laws. The first committee would scrutinize existing election law and recommend fresh suggestions while the second committee would work upon the structure, responsibilities and powers of election commissions. He said members of the commission would introduce new ways to prevent fraud, rigging in Wolesi Jirga, presidential, provincial and district council's elections. The election reforms commission had formally started working last week. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah during a meeting with its members said the panel would not be a symbolic body because the unity government remained committed to electoral reforms. The commission last Thursday formally began getting suggestions from political parties, civil society organizations, women rights activist and international stakeholders regarding reforms to the electoral system. Shah Sultan Akefi said the commission wanted to make the process transparent and the government was committed to bring reforms to the body. 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.

Reform panel embarks on collecting people's views

Bashir Ahmad Nadem, 02 August 2015

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): Embarking on a series of visits to provinces, Electoral Reform Commission chief

Shah Sultan Akefi on Sunday said people's views and suggestions were crucial to bringing about reforms in the electoral system. Akefi, who arrived in the capital of southern Kandahar province, met with Deputy Governor Abdul Ali Shamsi. Akefi said he visited Kandahar to meet people, tribal elders, religious scholars and civil society activists and listen to their views and suggestions regarding electoral reforms. "For reforms in the electoral system, people's views and proposals are very important," he said, adding the panel would visit different provinces in this regard. The commission chief said they had started consulting election observers, the international community, political parties and others on electoral reforms since a week. Akefi said they wanted to carry forward their activities in a precise manner and bring about such credible reforms that barred government leaders from appointing or removing electoral commissions' officials. "Our commission has started work about two weeks ago. We are trying to collect views, proposals and suggestions in three months and later produce them before the government leadership," Akefi said. He said the suggestions they had collected during the past two weeks recommended the launch of nationwide census, preparing a voter list, expediting the distribution of electronic identity cards and appointing impartial individuals in the electoral bodies. Akefi said he would remain in Kandahar for the next two days to meet influential figures, the youth, elders, women, journalists and civil society activists and record their views, which he promised to be incorporated in bringing electoral reforms. The deputy governor called elections a national process and said it was important to listen to people's views for the sake of transparency in the process. Abdul Ali Shamsi said if the electoral reform commission performed its job impartially, it would help restore people's trust in elections and would strengthen democracy.

“We have been assigned the task to record people’s views on provincial level about reforms in the electoral system.”



Above: Member of Electoral Reforms Commission.

**‘Consultations on electoral reforms beneficial’
Zeerak Fahim, 03 August 2015**

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Electoral Reform Commission officials said on Monday that consultations at provincial and regional levels on the electoral system’s technical and legal aspects had started producing good results. Shah Mahmood Miakhel, a member of the commission, told a gathering in eastern Nangarhar province that they would start working on an organised policy for the electoral process following consultations at provincial levels. The gathering in Jalalabad was attended by tribal elders, religious figures, provincial and high peace councils’ members who also floated their suggestions. The participants demanded changes in the electoral system’s technical and legal areas and the appointment of eligible individuals as provincial Independent Election Commission heads. Miakhel, who headed a delegation, told the gathering: “We have been assigned the task to record people’s views on provincial level about reforms in the electoral system.” He said the Electoral Reform Commission would benefit from people’s views in its meetings to prepare a policy and strategy about reforms. He said the panel was working to resolve problems in the electoral system’s technical and legal areas. “We have been thinking what we should do in the first phase for a short period as parliamentary elections are before us. Then we have presidential election and in the third phase it will be mulled over how to permanently overhaul the system and prevent irregularities forever.” Earlier, Nangarhar Governor Salim Khan Kunduzi urged the gathering to share their views with the visiting delegation in order problems in the electoral system could be addressed. “You witnessed problems and irregularities in the previous elections. Therefore, your proposals are essential for reforms,” the governor told the participants. Provincial council member Humira Rafi said a policy should be adopted for the picture-less female voter cards. She said powerful individuals used to print such cards on Election Day to stuff ballot boxes. Such electoral fraud created insecurity and questioned the vote’s credibility, she added. She also said populations in districts should be made known and constituencies be created for elections. Religious scholar Maulvi Abdul Zahir Haqqani accused the government and the election commission of committing fraud in the previous elections and thus disrespecting people’s mandate. He said basic reforms

should be brought to the electoral system in order to restore people’s trust that their votes were respected.

**Balkh residents call for reforms in poll bodies
Zabihullah Ehsas, 03 August 2015**

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Pajhwok): The residents of northern Balkh province on Monday said transparent future elections needed drastic reforms in the electoral bodies. They were speaking at a consultative gathering with officials of the Electoral Reform Commission in Mazar-i-Sharif, the provincial capital. The gathering was attended by Wolesi Jirga members, provincial council members, university teachers, civil society activists and local residents. Saleh Mohammad Registani, a member of the reform commission, told Pajhwok Afghan News on the sidelines of the gathering that members of their commission had started holding consultative meetings with people in provinces. The consultations were aimed at recoding views of civil society activists, the youth, tribal elders, provincial council and parliament members on how to bring about inclusive reforms to the electoral system, he added. He said the reform commission’s primary task was to bring introduce changes to the election law and the composition of the two electoral bodies. Prior to a decision in this regard, he said, the commission wanted to record people’s views. Lawmaker Haji Mohammad Obda, who attended the gathering, told Pajhwok Afghan News the creation of the electoral reform commission by the government was commendable. He said the job of the panel would be acceptable if it was able to bring about positive changes to the election law and the composition and authority of the electoral bodies. He said people had lost faith in the electoral bodies and the reform commission had been tasked with restoring that trust. Obda said changes to the electoral system should be brought keeping in view the country’s current situation. He said utmost care should be exercised in the appointment of commissioners on the electoral bodies. Balkh University teacher Mohammad Nazari said holding consultative meetings with the public regarding reforms in the electoral system was a positive step. He told Pajhwok Afghan News elections in Afghanistan were often marred by not properly understanding the technical and political process. He said no elections in the past had matched the country’s situation, something that needed greater attention as part of the reforms.

“Currently many women are deprived of their right to enfranchise as their votes are polled by their men who choose their candidates.”



Above: A consultation session on election reforms. Balkh, Afghanistan.

Past mistakes won't be repeated: Reform panel Sahel Mangal, 03 August 2015

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): The Electoral Reform Commission on Monday said past mistakes would not be repeated in future elections. This was stated by Kawon Kakar, a member of the commission, who headed a delegation to southeastern Paktia province. The delegation addressed a gathering attended by civil society activists, tribal elders and local residents in Gardez, the provincial capital. Speaking on behalf of civil society groups, Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai said people had lost trust in the electoral bodies during the previous elections. He added people would not participate in future elections until essential reforms were brought to the electoral bodies. He believed problems in elections could be mitigated if security was improved and electronic identity cards distributed. "Technical issues and mistakes did not harm the previous elections the most, but by deals on votes by a handful of individuals," he said. Similarly, tribal elder Janat Khan Mangal said voter cards had been distributed much beyond the voter lists in the previous polls. "These extra cards created most of the problems in the previous elections. One person had polled more than 100 votes in the previous election," he claimed. The elder said the authorities concerned should prevent next time bogus voter cards printed in Pakistan. A member of the provincial council, Shakeela Mangal, said efforts should be made to ensure that women fully participated in elections. "Currently many women are deprived of their right to enfranchise as their votes are polled by their men who choose their candidates." The Electoral Reform Commission representative, Kawon Kakar, told the gathering that they would share their proposals with the commission's officials and other relevant authorities.

Mega uplift projects proposed under NSP in Kandahar

Bashir Ahmad Nadem, 05 August 2015

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): Mega development schemes should be executed instead of small projects in different districts of southern Kandahar province under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) -- a flagship uplift plan of the government. Provincial Council Chairman Haji Syed Jan Khakrezwal says he has raised the issue at meetings with NSP officials and village council members. He underlined the imperative of

deriving maximum benefits from the important programme. Under the NSP, he suggested, massive development schemes be drawn up and executed at the village level for even-handed uplift of the province. For this to happen, he needs to meet village council members in each district on the nature of projects they urgently need. Khakrezwal acknowledges NSP projects could not be properly implemented in many villages for security reasons. In this situation, he believes, the ideal way is to let the public and their representatives decide unanimously on what the most-needed projects were. The council chairman, insisting on transparency in the use of government funds, also stresses a close watch on NSP, saying village council members should be residents of those areas and aware of local development requirements. He recently appointed a council delegation to monitor NSP schemes in Shorabak district. Haji Niamatullah Sherdili, a provincial council member, proposed reforms in village councils to prevent the possible misappropriation of funds and make them responsive to public needs. After the inspection of projects in different districts, the provincial council suspended the bodies that failed to perform efficiently. Ahmad Wali Azizi, NSP head for central and southern zones, visited Kandahar some days back. At meetings with provincial officials, he accused local strongmen and authorities of interfering in NSP affairs and stealing development funds. Azizi asked the governor to check corruption in the use of NSP funds and constitute development councils -- familiar with local development requirements -- to ensure the implementation of projects in line with people's needs.

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