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Newsletter

Your weekly newsupdate on the electoral process in Afghanistan

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“The Wolesi Jirga’s term has been extended following some dealings.”

WJ to continue until parliamentary ballot

Khwaja Basir Ahmad, 20 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament on Saturday approved continuation of its work beyond 22 June, amid criticism by some lawmakers calling the extension as illegal. In line with constitution, the elections should have taken place by now, but has been postponed indefinitely by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), citing lack of funds. The Presidential Palace on Friday said in a statement the incumbent house could continue with its work until the results of the next elections were announced and new lawmakers introduced. According the statement, the decision was taken following technical and financial issues, the need for electoral reforms and existence of security threats. Abdul Rauf Ibrahim, lower house speaker, told a general session the presidential palace would specify the elections date in one month. Lawmaker Shukria Barezai said: “I have severe objections over president’s statement. I wish the president had announced the elections date before this crisis.” She said unless the new lawmakers were elected the incumbent parliament was legal and no other organ could take any decisions about its fate. Ramazan Bashardost, MP from Kabul, said work of the house beyond June 22 was illegal. “The Wolesi Jirga’s term has been extended following some dealings.” Majority of the lawmakers by raising green cards approved the statement, extending the Wolesi Jirga’s work until elections were held and new lawmakers were introduced. Baktash Siawash, speaking after the session at a press conference, said the elections should have taken place and nobody had the right to extend current parliament’s term. “After June 22, anything the Wolesi Jirga does won’t have legitimacy.” He said after June 22 he would not use any of the facilities of parliament but would only attend the sessions. He added he had already returned his political passport, a computer and four weapons that were given to him by the house.

Electoral reforms commission to start work soon: CEO

Zarghona Salehi, 21 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has said electoral reforms commission will start work soon. He expressed these views in a meeting with Spanish Ambassador to Kabul Jose Rubio on Sunday. A statement from the CEO office said the government was committed to bring about fundamental reforms in the electoral system of the country. Abdullah assured all prerequisites for reforms have been finalized and the electoral reforms commission would start work soon. The commission would then present its suggestions

to the government in an opportune time. “The electoral reforms commission will continue its work under the leadership of the CEO office and will not have any connection to the election commissions because the panels have lost their credibility,” the statement added. The Spanish ambassador assured the European Union commitment to financially support the election process of Afghanistan, but on condition of reforms. Rubio hoped the elections reforms would take place soon at a specific time, saying his country was committed to stand by Afghanistan for long-term until the country became strong and united, the statement concluded.

‘International community backs parliamentary vote’

Halim Karimi, 22 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Ashraf Ghani on Monday said reforms in the electoral system would be brought through a special mechanism to reduce costs and make future elections transparent. The president said this during a meeting with leading United Nations members in Afghanistan at the Presidential Palace in Kabul, a statement from the palace said. The meeting discussed people’s trust in credibility of elections and the date and costs of the parliamentary polls. The UN members assured the international community would financially support the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. Ghani said the Afghan electoral bodies should be developed more in technical area. He said any kind of reforms in the electoral system suggested by the commissions, relevant organs and the people would be acceptable. “It is important that ulema and influential individuals also share their suggestions how to prevent fraud during elections,” Ghani said, adding that Afghans’ awareness about elections had increased and they also wanted transparency in the process. “We don’t want to impose our own options on people about elections, we want people to identify any electoral fraud and give their suggestions to us in correcting the system,” he said. The president added the election process should be completely secured by security forces and stressed reduced election costs. Calling balance in designating polling stations as important, Ghani said the government would help the election commissions supply logistics and election materials to all parts of the country. He also said employing government officers in the election process was also important because it would help reduce the costs and maintain impartiality. “Our aim is to create a comprehensive mechanism that overcomes our reliance on foreign organs,” the president said. He asked the UN officials to share their suggestions with the government based on their experiences from the past elections.

“Leaders of the unity government pledged complete electoral reforms, but the promises have still not been materialized.”



Above: CEO Abdullah Abdullah in a meeting with Spanish ambassador to Kabul

Suggestions for electoral reforms submitted to govt

Mohammad Hassan Khettab, 16 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): A joint working committee of political parties, civil society organisations and media has submitted a set of suggestions for electoral reforms to the unity government. The joint statement has been prepared by the working committee of more than 100 political parties, civil society and media organisations with the help of Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA). The suggestion included electoral reforms commission, population survey, distribution of electronic identity cards, convening of Loya Jirga, equipping the elections commission and reforms in the commissions. Other issues in the statement included close coordination among election commissions, change in voting process and short-term reforms for the upcoming parliamentary elections. FEFA Chief Nader Naderi said the group taking its historical responsibilities into consideration tried to highlight the concerned issues that needed general or short-term reforms in the statement. He added the leaders of the unity government pledged complete electoral reforms, but the promises have still not been materialized eight months after the formation of the government. Electoral reforms were a major point of agreement between President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah which the unity government was formed. Based on a presidential decree, the electoral reforms panel was formed three months back but it still hasn't embarked on its work. The statement titled "basic principles of electoral reform" was signed by leaders of political parties and civil society organisations and was submitted to the representatives of the president and CEO. Ahmad Zia Masoud, President's special representative for reforms and good governance addressing the event, said majority of the points mentioned in the statement was acceptable to the government and the statement could make work of electoral reforms commission easier. Masoud added the independent election commission had a major task of conducting fair elections. Sayed Hussein Fazel Sancharaki, cultural advisor to the CEO, said without fundamental reforms no elections would take place. He said it was imperative that the electronic identity cards be distributed soon.

President urged to specify parliamentary polls' date

Zarghona Salehi, 20 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): Election watchdog organizations on Saturday welcomed President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's decision to allow Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament to work till fresh elections were held. They, however, said that president should have specified the exact date of upcoming parliamentary election besides extension of the incumbent house. Earlier, Ghani said the sitting Wolesi Jirga would continue until date for parliamentary elections were announced after one month. A statement from Presidential Palace said that technical, security, financial and other problems led to delay in conducting Wolesi Jirga elections. The statement said it was decided the incumbent Wolesi Jirga would continue work keeping in view the current problems and challenges. It said that the government was committed to announce date for the crucial ballot within one month. According to Article 83 of the Constitution, new Wolesi Jirga members should start work on June 22. Naeem Ayubzada, head of the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA), said the president should have taken the decision after June 22. Regarding legality of the decision, he said if the president consulted on the issue with judges than it could not be termed as illegal. Painda Hikmat, spokesman of Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), welcome president's decision regarding fate of Wolesi Jirga and said the president provided legality to a strong institution of the country. He also stressed over announcement of election date in order to remove confusion and suspicion. But Khat-i-Naw in a statement expressed concerns over the president's decision and demanded the declaration of election date. The statement added the government should first create the electoral reform commission to and introduce necessary reforms to the system and assure the civil society organization about the conduct of free and fair polls. It said the government should have consulted about the fate of WJ with heads of main government institutions, national leaders and civil society organizations.

“The poll panels should hold meetings with different groups and organizations to regain people’s trust.”



Above: Conference on releasing the declaration of substantive principles of electoral reforms

Efforts on to print ballot papers inside country: Ghani

Ahmad Qureshi, 20 June 2015

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has said government is all ready to invest in domestic printing houses aimed at printing ballot papers inside the country. The meeting with officials of electoral panels held on Friday at Presidential Palace, a statement said. Officials of both electoral panels presented their suggestions regarding parliamentary and district council elections, reassessing of polling stations, hiring permanent staff at the commissions and preparing voters' list. Regarding reforms in election commissions, Ghani said, the panels should hold meetings with different groups and organizations to regain people's trust. The commission should also start a discourse on how to appoint top officials and professional individuals. Ghani stressed talks should also be held with legal and judicial organs in order to reduce misuse the positions by the commission's officials. He added both the commissions should send their delegations to India in order to learn from the experience of New Delhi in the elections process. Regarding date for elections, he added, an appropriate time should be chosen so that pressure on security forces be reduced. Ghani said the government was prepared to invest on domestic printing houses to facilitate printing of ballot papers inside the country. It would prove both financially beneficial for the country and would boost domestic printing houses as well. He insisted that the unity government was committed to bring electoral reforms.

New governor pledges to develop Khost

Mohammad Haroon, 16 June 2015

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): The newly appointed governor to southeastern Khost province on Tuesday pledged to protect rights of the people and develop this strategically located province. Hukam Khan Habibi said this in a gathering arranged in his honor, which was attended by a delegation arrived form capital Kabul, tribal elders, religious scholars and citizen of the province. "Close

coordination among institutions, rule of law, speedy justice, eradication of corruption and stability will be among my priorities," he noted. According to Hukam Khan, building peace and stability was sole responsibility of security forces but it was responsibility of civilians to extend all out cooperation to armed forces. He would address existing problems faced by education sector, which was important for the development of the country. Provincial Council Chief Amirullah Zraswand urged governor to eliminate corruption and distribute resources on equal basses to all districts. Gul Nasir Zadran, a tribal elder, said education sector needed more attention and asked the governor to create jobs opportunities for educated youth.

New Samangan governor vows development projects

Mohammad Barat, 17 June 2015

AIBAK (Pajhwok): Mohammad Hashem Zari, the newly-appointed governor for northern Samangan province on Wednesday pledged security, launching development projects, and ensuring freedom of expression. Hashem Zari was officially introduced to local officials and residents of Samangan province by Mohammad Nader Yama, policy deputy of Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). Yama urged residents to extend all out cooperation to the new governor in ensuring security, rule of law, rooting out administrative graft and good governance. The governor said with people's cooperation his immediate priorities would be ensuring safety and security of residents, fighting administrative graft, ensuring citizen's rights, implementing development projects, providing job opportunities for youth, unity among people, modernizing the agriculture sector and providing better health services. He assured residents of stern action against those officials who did not have good performance in providing services to people. About his support for freedom of expression, Zari said: "I believe in democracy and freedom of speech. Media in Samangan have the right to reflect the truth in line with principle of journalism." Sayed Abdul Alim Sadaat,

“Paktika needed experienced officials and the new governor should fully discharge his responsibilities.”



Above: Ballot papers during elections

New Paktika governor pledges security, peace

Sahel Mangal, 22 June 2015

SHARANA (Pajhwok): The new governor for southeastern Paktika province on Monday took charge with pledges to improve security, bring peace and uphold merit. The governor, Aminullah Shariq, and the new police chief, Brig. Ali Mast Mohmand, were introduced to the people of Paktika by Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) deputy head Abdul Malik Seddique at a gathering in Sharana, the provincial capital. On the occasion, Seddique said the new governor was an experienced and capable person, who would be able to resolve the existing problems in Paktika. He urged the new governor to work for strengthening unity among tribes, security and peace in the province. Nadir Khan Katawazai, a lawmaker from Paktika, told the gathering that Paktika needed experienced officials and the new governor should fully discharge his responsibilities. The Wolesi Jirga member said there were no warlords and drugs in the province and residents were fed up with the conflict, thus providing good working environment for officials. Other speakers also urged the new governor to improve security besides fighting administrative corruption. In his address, the new governor said strengthening security, bringing peace, increasing coordination among security organs, narrowing the gap between the government and the people and upholding merit would remain his top priorities. He said his focus would be on services to the people and empowering government entities. The introduction gathering was attended by Wolesi Jirga members, provincial council members, civil society activists, government officials and tribal elders.

Women brave challenges during polls in southeast

Sahel Mangal, 22 June 2015

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): Women in southeastern Paktia, Paktika and Khost provinces have to face problems while partaking in elections, shrinking their turnout. These concerns are being expressed by several individuals and groups at a time when the parliamentary elections should have taken place in the previous two months and the new parliament should have been inaugurated today (June 22)

under the Constitution. But President Ashraf Ghani has extended the parliament term until the parliamentary elections are held and the new parliament inaugurated. Ihsanullah Hamidi, Free and Fair Election Foundation head for Paktia, told Pajhwok Afghan News women had to brave problems during their participation in elections in Paktia, Paktika and Khost. He said women's participation in elections had been low due to lack of awareness and cultural barriers. He said a fewer number of female workers to perform election duty also impacted women's turnout as men did not allow their women to be searched by men. The lack of awareness among women about elections was another main hurdle as women did not know the importance of vote, he said. Additionally, he added, cultural sensitivity and barriers prevented women from casting their votes. Hamidi proposed the inclusion of elections, their importance as a subject in the educational curriculum so that the new generation avoids elections related problems. He said civil society, elders, election officials and other departments concerned should jointly work to facilitate people's participation in elections. Maulvi Jahad Gul, a religious scholar in Khost, said women constituted half of the country's populations and life was incomplete without women. Therefore, he said, their participation in politics and decision making was important. He confirmed women's participation in elections had been lukewarm due to cultural barriers in Paktia, Khost and Paktika provinces. Haji Zareen Katawazai, a local elder in Paktika, said several groups were working to increase women's participation in elections and find solutions to problems they faced. Hamida Orgonai, a civil society activist in Paktika, said women's participation in elections had never been seriously taken and security and cultural barriers had restricted their participation in polls. Recalling the past elections, she said, women workers were present in only four polling stations in Paktika during the previous elections, depriving many females from exercising their right to enfranchise. Paktia women's affairs director Nasrin Orykhail told Pajhwok Afghan News she had organised several awareness workshops where religious scholars briefed women about their participation in elections.

“I don't know about their absence but I can say the council members go to far-off areas to meet people.”



Above: Ongoing session of lower house of parliament

Nuristan PC members accused of absenteeism

Zeeraq Fahim, 22 June 2015

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): At least two provincial council members have never attended the elected body's sessions in eastern Nuristan province, the acting governor said on Monday. Hafiz Abdul Qayum told Pajhwok Afghan News the two had been living in Kabul and had never attended the council meetings since their election, while the remaining four members irregularly attended the sessions. The Nuristan provincial council has nine members. Qayum said the Independent Directorate of Local Government should take notice of the absenteeism and find a permanent solution to the issue. However, the acting governor did not name the council members living in Kabul. The council head, Eng Saadullah, told Pajhwok Afghan News one of the two members living in Kabul had been nominated for a working committee and the second had personal dispute with the acting governor. The absent members did not receive salaries and were marked absent, he said, adding: "Nuristan is a mountainous region, the remaining seven members visit far flung areas to know people's problems and they have to stay for few days in the remote areas, therefore they do not come to office on regular basis". Saadullah also mentioned the council's achievements and said they had effectively monitored projects concerning education, health and development and had been able to resolve several problems and tribal disputes. Eng Ajmal, a local resident, said the provincial council members were performing well as compared to their predecessors. "I don't know about their absence but I can say the council members go to far-off areas to meet people and try to solve their issues." Ajmal confirmed the council members used to monitor projects and hoped they would continue to do so.

Paktia PC stresses election date be specified

Reporter Name, Date

GARDEZ (Pajhwok): The provincial council members and civil society activists in southeastern Paktia province on Saturday suggested the sitting Wolesi Jirga should be dissolved and date for fresh parliamentary elections be announced. Most of Wolesi Jirga members have inflicted loss to the country instead and the house dissolution is in country's favour.

According to Article 83 of the Constitution, new Wolesi Jirga members should start work on June 22. The article adds election for the lower house should be held one or two months ahead of the expiry of the parliament term. Mohammad Rehman Qadari, secretary provincial council, told a press conference the extension tenure of the sitting lower house of parliament would be an illegal step. He suggested President Ashraf Ghani and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) should specify date for new election and the sitting members should be removed. Every lawmaker gets 400,000 monthly stipends from the government and if the lower house is scrapped then the nation will spend the saved money on the election instead, he added. Hafizullah Mubariz, deputy head of provincial council, said that a number of Wolesi Jirga members did several illegal works. He said that some lawmakers had got appointed their relatives on key posts, which paved way for them to mint money and promote corruption. Social society activists also aired same reservations by saying that sitting members of lower house should be sent home to save money. Sayed Jamaluddin Asifkhel, head of Paktia cultural network, said: "We know Wolesi Jirga's existence of paramount importance in democratic setup but our lawmakers are involved in doing illegal deeds." The president, he demanded should scrap the Wolesi Jirga and announce election for fresh ballot without further delay.

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