

AFGHANISTAN

ABDUL SAMAD

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Review

The people of Afghanistan will succeed!" the 91-year-old Zahir Shah told the assembly to applause. The parliamentary and provincial council elections were held on 18 September 2005. Afterwards, the first results were declared on 9 October. Final results were delayed by accusations of fraud, and were announced on 12 November. Former warlords and their followers gained the majority of seats in both the Lower House and provincial councils. Women won around 28% of the seats in the Lower House, six seats more than the 25% guaranteed in the Afghan Constitution which was launched in 2004. Approximately twelve million voters were eligible to vote for the 249 seats of the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of Parliament, and the 34 provincial councils.

Executive Summary of March 2008:

During the month of March 2008, the re-publishing of the Prophet Mohammad Cartoons in Denmark and the anti-Islam film made in the Netherlands created allot of anger amongst the Senators and MPs of both houses of the Afghan Parliament. Both Houses condemned these actions and issued individual as well as joint statements.

The budget for the year 1387 (2008/2009) presented to the Upper and Lower Houses earlier was approved by both Houses of the Parliament.

The Draft Elections Law came to the Lower House for approval. This law has been in the Commissions of the Lower House for almost a month and three times appeared in the agendas of the general sessions of the Lower House. At the end of the month of March, MPs have only managed to approve

three articles of this law. While the Lower House was deliberating on the draft elections law, the government was also holding regular consultative meetings with members of the international community, MPs, Senators and government officials about elections related issues. The main item on the agenda of these meetings were to hold Presidential, Parliamentary, Provincial Councils and District Councils elections jointly or separately, discussions on the funding of the elections and security related issues, as well as to give or not to give a role to political parties.

There was another riot in the Pule-Charkhi prison. Once again prisoners and a delegation of MPs allegedly blamed prison officials for corruption and lack of competence.

Month of April:

The draft political parties' law, which was approved earlier by the Lower House, was also approved by the Upper House on the 1st of April. According to the version of the draft approved by the Upper House, political parties already registered with the Ministry of Justice need to register again three months after the adoption of this law and should have 10,000 members at the time of registration.

The Lower House discussed the draft elections law on the 2nd of April and approved the Single Non Transferable Voting (SNTV) System for the up-coming elections. There were some MPs who voted for the Proportional Representation System (PR), however, majority MPs voted for the SNTV system. Those in favor of this system argued that political parties didn't have a good reputation in Afghanistan and majority of the political parties are linked to foreign

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countries, therefore the SNTV system is good for all Afghans if they want to become candidates and contest the elections.

The Lower House decided that electoral centers for the next elections will be established in the centers of the Districts and cities. Upper House of the Afghan Parliament discussed the assassination of Ustad Abdul Sabor Farid, one of its Senators from Kapisa province, who was assassinated almost a year ago in the daylight in the city of Kabul. A report was presented about this case by the son of the deceased Senator to the Upper House, who said that nothing constructive has happened in relation to this case and all relevant offices of the government keep sending documents to one another without starting serious investigation about this criminal case.

On the 8th of April, Lower House MPs discussed electoral centers for the Kuchis (Nomads). The draft elections law proposes electoral centers for the Kuchis in every province of Afghanistan. However, there were some MPs who were not in favour of this and said that electoral centers should only be established for the nomads where they reside. Pro and against Kuchis MPs traded harsh words against one another, after one MP saying that the Kuchis didn't have the right to have electoral centers in every province of the country, a pro-Kuchi MP said that they did have the right and he didn't consider this MP as the citizen of this country.

The issue of approving electoral centers in every province of Afghanistan and MPs arguing against one another on this issue has prompted some MPs to start a protest against what has been proposed and approved in the draft electoral law for the Kuchis. Protesting MPs say that giving the Kuchis 10 seats in the Lower House and also electoral centers in every province is against the constitution. However, other MPs have argued that the Kuchis are the most deprived citizens of this country, as they do not have access to some of the basic services such as education, health and clean water and just giving them 10 seats in the Lower House and facilities in all the

provinces to vote is not a great privilege. The same MPs have also argued that when the cabinet seats and other high ranking government seats are shared according to ethnic groups, the protesting MPs have never raised their voice.

According to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), Presidential election would be held in the autumn of 1387 or late 2009 and Parliamentary election six months later. To-date, the first two candidates who have declared themselves as candidates for the Presidential election are the outspoken Lower House MP and former Minister of Planning, Ramazan Bashardost and the incumbent President, Hamid Karzai, who was speaking to University graduates at the Kabul University on Monday 21st of April. President Karzai said, "I didn't not even imagine becoming the President of Afghanistan prior to the Bonn gathering on Afghanistan in late 2001, but now I will not let it go". There are also some news circling in the media that the former Minister of Interior Affairs, Ali Ahmad Jalali is contemplating about becoming a candidate for the Presidential election.

The protest of the so called proconstitution MPs in the Lower House continued, however, those MPs who were present on Wednesday April 16 in the Lower House discussed the continued protest of these MPs and majority MPs who were in the house were not happy by this action and asked them to come back to the house soon and discuss any grievances they have with other MPs in the House and jointly find a solution. MP from Kabul, Shenkai Karokhil said the protesting MPs should not be continuing with this nonsense protests because the Kuchis were one of the most disadvantaged communities of this country. They do not have access to many services including education, clean water, health and many others.

The main agenda on this day was the draft salary law forwarded by the government for approval of the Lower House. In this draft law the lowest salary has been proposed 6,400 Afghani (\$120) and the highest is a little more than (\$600) per-month.

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As the protest of MPs continued on the 20th of April, the Upper House was working as usual and managed to approve the draft labour law which was approved earlier by the Lower House. When the draft labour law was presented last year for approval to the Lower House, members of the only Workers Union in Kabul, Afghanistan, demonstrated in front of the Parliament and expressed their unhappiness about his law.

On the 22nd of April, Lower House discussed the issue of foreign unsuitable television series being shown on private television channels in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Information, members of the Parliament and the Ulama Council are asking private television channels to stop showing these series, as they are considered to be against the culture of Afghans.

Just before the end of the month of April, there was an attack by insurgents on President Karzai during the Mujahideen victory day parade. Three people were killed including a Lower House MP, Fazul Rahman Chamkani from Paktia, and eleven others were injured in this attack. Two days later, the three government security officials, Ministers of Defence and Interior and the Head of National Security Directorate were called in for interpellation by the Lower House, to explain their lack of competence. But all three security officials received majority vote of confidence at the end of the session and continue to serve in their respected seats.

During the last week of the month of April, the Lower House discussed some articles of the draft salary law despite the so called proconstitution MPs continuing with their strike.

Conclusions:

The so called pro-constitution MPs are still on strike as the month of April comes to the end. These MPs have been missing from the house since the 8th of April.

As the pro-constitution MPs dragged their strike and stayed away from the general session of the Lower House from the first

week of the month of April, the issue of MPs absenteeism was once again the subject of discussions during the last week of the month of April. Not only the striking MPs were missing from the house but a large number of other MPs have also been missing through out the month of April. Some MPs in the house said that they didn't know the reason behind the lack of interest of these MPs, and have asked the Speaker of the House to dedicated some meetings to this issue and find out what exactly what is the reason that a large number of MPs continue to remain absent.

Parliamentary elections are almost two years away but the current Lower House of the Afghan Parliament is already losing its effectiveness. There are some MPs who are trying to urge other MPs in the Lower House to continue showing interest in the work of the Lower House and the problems of the citizens of Afghanistan but to no avail, as a large number of MPs continue to stay away from the house.