

AFGHANISTAN

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CONTACT

DR. BABAK KHALATBARI

AUTHORS

ABDUL SAMAD

DR. BABAK KHALATBARI

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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 September:

During the month September, Lower House MPs have been trying to approve the draft electoral law prior to the beginning of voter registration in the north-eastern and central provinces. The draft electoral law has been in and out of the general sessions of the Lower House many times and during the month of September some Lower House MPs expressed their disapproval about the current composition of the electoral commission. These MPs believed that current officials of the electoral commissions

are pro-government as they are all appointed by the government. These Lower House MPs want officials of the electoral commission to get the approval of the Lower House.

During the month of September there was another incident of civilian casualties and this time it happened in one of the inner suburbs of Kabul city (Hotkhil) situated on the road from Kabul to Jalalabad. What was very distressing about this incident was that two very young infants about 2 years old were also killed. The people of Hotkhil were very upset about this incident and closed the main Kabul to Jalalabad road for hours. The demonstrators were demanding to know who was behind this act and they also wanted the return of two persons taken away from the house at night. Media reported that foreign and government security forces denied involvement in this incident. Senators and MPs once again expressed their disgust at the continuation of civilian casualties and especially the killings of infants.

Both houses of the Afghan Parliament along with officials of the central government tried to resolve the recent issue of land grab in Takhar province. About 1,000 refugees who have recently returned from the neighboring countries to try and settle back in their homes and take possession of their lands are being denied access by powerful armed militia commanders. After more than seven years of the current government and the wide presence of the international com-

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munity in Afghanistan, in some areas of the country, Afghans are still reluctant, unable, and afraid to return to their homes and lands.

Month of October 2008:

In the first week of the month of October, Upper House Senators called in government officials who are members of the government 'emergency committee'. Upper House Senators voiced their concern about the lack of preparedness of this committee to deliver the needed commodities to the poor and vulnerable people in the provinces of Afghanistan during the upcoming winter. Numerous provinces are faced with shortages of wheat stocks due to little or no rain fall in the beginning of the year 1387 (2007/2008).

Lower House MPs discussed the draft taxation law. An article related to the collection of taxation was deliberated on and a number of MPs wanted the 'commercial court' to collect taxes rather than the Ministry of Finance, however, majority MPs voted for the Ministry of Finance. Lower House MPs as they have done since inauguration in December 2005 once again discussed the organization of the MPs overseas visits and the problem of the absenteeism.

On the 7th of October, Upper House Senators discussed the complaints of their constituents in relation to the ever increasing problems of poverty, lack of proper education in their provinces, the dilemma of public health, lack of proper transportation roads and wide spread unemployment. On this day Upper House Senators also approved the draft petroleum law. The head of the complaints hearing commission and its members visited a number of newly established private hospitals in the city of Kabul to follow on for themselves if the people's complaints in relation to the high charges of fees, lack of hygiene,

lack of ambulances, prescription of expensive medicines, taking of blood not appropriate with medical standards and the appointment of foreign doctors as specialists who have recently graduated from the University. After this visit, there was a report in the media that one of the hospitals named 'Wahaj' complained about the behavior of the members of the commission. However, the Head of the Upper House Commission dismissed this complaint. Media reported that the people had more complaints about the mentioned hospitals. Media also reported that "Wahaj" hospital was not willing to give access to members of the Upper House Commission.

On the 11th of October, Lower House MPs discussed the draft residency law for foreigners, who would like to live and work in Afghanistan. Based on this version of the draft law, a foreigner who wanted to live and work in Afghanistan would have needed to pay \$30. However, Lower House MPs increased this amount to \$100. Upper House Senators commended some athletes who recently participated in a tournament and returned to Afghanistan with medals.

The complaints hearing commission of the Upper House heard the complaints of the people living in Bagrami area of Kabul. These families complained to the mentioned commission about the destruction of 200 houses by the Kabul Municipality. The mentioned commission also heard a complaint about the sale of unregistered SIM cards of the mobile telephone companies (Roshan and AWCC) in the black market. Upper House Senators discussed and approved some article of the draft investment law on the 12th of October.

Lower House MPs voted for and approved the three newly appointed Ministers of Interior Affairs,

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Education and Agriculture. President Karzai appointed the former Minister of Education, Mohamad Hanif Atmar, as the new Minister of Interior Affairs. Farouq Wardak, former Minister of Parliamentary Affairs as the new Minister of Education and Mohammad Asif Rahimi, former Deputy Minister of Rural Development as the new Minister of Agriculture and Live Stocks. The former Minister of Interior Affairs, Zarar Ahmad Moqbil, who was appointed as the new Minister of Refugee Affairs did not report to the Lower House to get the approval of the Lower House MPs citing illness.

During the month of October as it has happened many times in the past five years, there was another hunger strike in the Pul-e-Charkhi prison. Once again the Judicial Affairs Commission of the Lower House discussed the issues that led to the hunger strike with the prisoners and officials and convinced the prisoners to end their hunger strike. The commission also promised the prisoners to discuss their problems and requests with government and security officials.

On the 22nd of October, Upper House Senators called in the governors of Herat, Badghis, Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Ghazni, Logar and Maidan Wardak to discuss the ever increasing insecurity in these provinces and lack of competence of officials in these provinces. During the month of October, Lower House MPs representing the province of Herat decided to go on strike for the reasons that they are unhappy with the continued insecurity, kidnapping and lack of competence of provincial officials.

Conclusion:

Since the collapse of the Taliban government a number of private hospitals are established in the city

of Kabul. The monitoring of these hospitals by the members of the Afghan Parliament is obviously a good news to the patients and people of Kabul and Afghanistan, however, what is even better is for the relevant government institution to regularly monitor the activities of privately owned businesses.

During the month of October, the President made some changes to his cabinet and most importantly changed the Minister of Interior Affairs. Media reported that Mr. Zarar Ahmad Moqbil, the former Minister of Interior Affairs was not happy to be removed from his previous post. The main prison in Kabul (Pul-e-Charkhi) witnessed another unrest during the month of October. Once again prisoners alleged that they are being treated inhumanely by prison officials. Prisoners sew their lips in protest and decided to go on hunger strike. Prisoners and also some Lower House MPs have called for the removal of the Investigation Department of the National Directorate of Security.

Lower House MPs from Herat and the people of Herat have been complaining about provincial security and administrative officials for a long time. Herat MPs and people allege that provincial officials are unable to prevent kidnapping, robberies and the activities of illegal armed persons.