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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: The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAF) office in Kabul, Afghanistan, covered the work of the Afghan Parliament for the past two years. The Afghan government, its Parliament, and most importantly the Afghan people are going through the most challenging time since the end of the Taliban government in late 2001. Unless the lives of ordinary Afghans are improved and improved quickly, security, stability and eventual peace will remain a distant reality.

Parliamentary Affairs: On the 1st of March 2009 - Upper House Senators discussed the President's

decree issued on holding Presidential and Provincial Councils elections in April 2009 and majority Senators said that for various reasons (insecurity and logistical) this decree could not be implemented. Majority Senators supported the decision of the election commission to hold the Presidential and Provincial Council elections on the 20th of August 2009.

The newly appointed Minister of Finance, Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal was introduced to the Lower House for approval. 144 MPs voted for Mr. Zakhilwal. On this day the 2nd of March 2009, 198 MPs were present in the Lower House.

In a session of the Upper House on the 10th of March 2009, Upper House Senator, Noor Mohammad said that recently a unit of the Afghan National Army in a joint operation with the coalition forces in the Alesay district of Kapisa province arrested innocent persons labelling them as insurgents. The persons were beaten by the Afghan army soldiers and during the beating one person died and others were severely injured. Upper House Senators also discussed the up-coming international conference on Afghanistan which will be held in the Netherlands.

Media reported about the resignation of Saleh Mohammad Rigistani, a Lower House MP from Panjshir. According to media reports of 11th of March 2009, MP Rigistani resigned from the Lower House for

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the reasons that the Afghan government violated laws of the country and could not give a clear timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

The Lower House Senators of the Afghan Parliament approved 4 million Euros granted by the German Development Bank (KfW) to Afghan banks to be issued as small credits to the Afghans which were repayable after 15 years to the Afghan government. During this session on the 11th of March 2009, Lower House MPs discussed the Afghan budget for the year 1388 (2009/10) and as the Senators in the Upper House, they also criticised the unbalanced budgetary allocated to the provinces. MPs assigned the "budget commission" to once again review the budget and make appropriate amendments and then present before the general session.

Upper House of the Afghan Parliament in its meeting on the 14th of March 2009, strongly condemned the killing of civilians in the Charkh district of Logar province on the 13th of March 2009. Dr. Ahmadzai, Upper House Senator from Logar presented a report about this incident. He said that this operation was conducted without any coordination with Afghan forces. Upper House Senators expressed their grief about these operations and said that the Afghan people have had enough of such conducts.

The Upper House of the Afghan Parliament approved the Afghan government budget for the year 1388 (2009/10) on the 18th of March 2009. According to the government funded daily, "Anis" on this day the budget was approved by 73 MPs whereas 42 MPs voted against it. Lower House of the Afghan Parliament consists of 249 MPs representing the 34 provinces

of Afghanistan in proportion to their population. The largest numbers of MPs come from Kabul province (33) and the least number of MPs represent the newly created province of Panjshir (2).

According to the local media reports Lower House MP Daad Mohammad Khan from the province of Helmand was killed in the mentioned province on the 19th of March 2009. He was killed along with three of his bodyguards after a road side bomb exploded. On the 23rd of March 2009, the Lower House MPs summoned the relevant security officials of the Afghan government to the Lower House to provide an explanation about the killing of MP Daad Mohammad Khan. The Lower House MPs said that **11 MPs have been killed to-date** but the killers have not been arrested and prosecuted.

Hamidullah Farouqi, the newly appointed Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation received 174 votes of approval from the Lower House MPs, however, the newly appointed Minister for Haj, Sidiq Chakari, who is the Deputy of Jamiate Party, Headed by Burhanudin Rabani only received 52 votes of approval and 121 voted against him. Previously, Mr. Farouqi was a teacher at the Economics Faculty of the Kabul University. The main reason that Mr. Chakari was not approved by majority of the Lower House MPs was that majority MPs criticised him for his outspokenness and opposition to the current government but when he was offered the post of the Minister for Haj, he didn't hesitate to accept the job.

Elections: On the 2nd of March 2009, two days after the Presidential decree about holding elections in April 2009, the government

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funded newspaper Annis daily had on its front cover the following headlines: 1- US State Department supports the country's Presidential decree on holding Presidential elections. 2- Hillary Clinton and President Karzai spoke on the telephone about holding elections, the situation in Afghanistan and the various aspects of bilateral cooperation. 3 - The Ulema Council supports the President's decision on ensuring the rule of law and protecting stability. 4 – Shir Mohammad Akhonzada, Upper House Senator supports the President's decision of holding elections in accordance with the law.

Upper House Speaker and majority of the Senators said that holding presidential election in April 2009 would be impossible. Upper House Speaker said that Afghanistan should not fund the expensive election process from its own revenues and the funds for this election need to be provided by the international community and they have said already that they prefer holding the Presidential and provincial councils elections in August 2009.

On the 4th of March 2009, the Afghan election commission once again announced the date of the 20th of September 2009 for the presidential and provincial councils' elections. After this date was announced, a number of potential presidential candidates and members of the Upper House of the Afghan Parliament expressed their support. The debate now seems to be about whether the incumbent President, Hamid Karzai should leave this post to an interim President or continue until the end of the Presidential elections. Ahraf Ghani Ahmadzai, former Minister for Finance during the interim and transitional governments says that Karzai can stay but he can not use his executive powers after his term

ends on the 22nd of May 2009. There are others who are calling upon the President to leave the post to an interim administration, former President during the civil war of the early 1990s is one of them. Nasrullah Stanakzai, teacher of the Kabul university law faculty says that it would be better to find a political solution for the remaining time from the 22nd of May to the 20th of August 2009 and he prefers a tripartite meeting of the Afghan government, the Afghan parliament and the Supreme Court to find a solution for this issue, however, he is of the view that the constitution of Afghanistan has been clearly violated.

Potential Presidential candidate and former Minister of Finance Ashraf Ghanzi Ahmadzai said that after the term of the current President ends the power vacuum should be filled based on national interests. The incumbent President Karzai said that the Supreme Court will have the final say in this regard. Mr. Ahmadzai added that he is concerned about the issue of power vacuum and would like a monitoring body to monitor the upcoming elections. Mr. Ahmadzai went on to say that he will not allow government officials to use their offices in favour of a particular candidate. Upper House Speaker, Sebghatullah Mujadedi said that important issues should be solved with the consultation of the members of both the Houses of the Afghan Parliament, the Supreme Court and tribal elders.

Lower House MP from Nangarhar province Mirwais Yasseni, and Lower House MP from Kabul, Shahla Atta, both announced their candidacy for the Presidential election on the 9th of March 2009.

According to the local media, Presidential candidate Anwarul Haq

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Ahadi was speaking to his supporters on the 14th of March 2009. He said that all the current problems of Afghanistan are attributed to the leadership of President Karzai. Mr. Ahadi added that incompetent persons were appointed to high government posts. He went on to say that there is doubt about the government's effort to speak with the Taliban. In response to that-Sebghatullah Sanjar, Head of the President's Policy Office rejected these accusations by Mr. Ahadi and said that if the Afghan government leadership is weak, then why Mr. Ahadi was also an important member of the government's cabinet until recently.

The Afghan election commission announced on the 29th of March 2009 that potential candidates for the Presidential and provincial councils' elections can register their names with this commission on the 23rd, 24th and 25th of April 2009. According to the mentioned commission the final list of the candidates will be announced after the candidates are investigated for not having any links with illegal armed groups and their candidacy is not funded by external sources. These are just some of the condition for becoming a candidate. The Afghan election commission says that 17 million Afghans have registered as voters.

According to the local media, on the 30th of March 2009 the Supreme Court announced that President Karzai can remain in his post until the end of the Presidential election. The Supreme Court said that it considers the postponement of the Presidential and Provincial Councils' Election in violation of the article 61 of the Afghan constitution and it also understands the logistical, financial and security obstacles before the Afghan election commission. The Supreme Court

said that this decision was made in the interest of the Afghan people.

Security and Governance: The government funded Anis daily reported that the IDLG (Independent Directorate for Local Governance) held a workshop for 60 district governors on the 3rd of March 2009 in Kabul as part of its program to improve local governance at districts level. The district governors will speak about security, economic, community and political issues. The IDLG has requested that the representatives of the ministries of interior, agriculture, rural development, the NDS and the human rights commission will participate in this workshop and answer questions from the district governors. This workshop will continue for three days.

Local media reported the kidnaping of an Army General Azimudin from the northern suburb of Khairkhana in Kabul on the 9th of March 2009. The Ministry of Defence said that it is making efforts to find the General.

Media reported the appointment of Sidiq Chakari as the new Minister of Haj and Religious Trusts and Hamidullah Farouqi as the new Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation. Sidiq Chakari served as the Minister of Culture during the mujahideen government in the early 1990s and is Deputy of Jamiat Party Headed by the former President Burhanudin Rabani. Hamidullah Farouqi was a teacher at the Economics Faculty of Kabul University prior to this post.

According to the local media, a father and his four children were killed by the coalition forces in the Charkh district of Logar province on the 14th of March 2009. Coalition forces said that this operation was carried by them and said to

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the media that they found weapons in the compound which they destroyed immediately for the reasons that coalition forces did not want these weapons to be used again by insurgents. Logar provincial Officials said that the five persons were all civilians and hundreds of local people also demonstrated in protest. The Provincial Council closed its office in protest to this incident and officials said that until the people behind this incident are not arrested, the door of this office will remain closed.

According to the local media, coalition forces conducted another operation on the 15th of March 2009 and this time they took with them a former jihadi commander belonging to the Ittehd-e-Islami Party. Logar Chief of Police, Ghulam Mustafa Muhseni said to the media that coalition forces informed them about this operation but they did not mention the timing of the operation. Local people said that Mullah Ismai belonged to the mentioned party, however, he was not involved in any political activity. Local people asked for his immediate release and if he is not released they will start their protest.

Dr. Shakila Hashimi, Lower House MP from Logar province who was amongst 1,000 demonstrators moving towards Pul-e-Alam the provincial centre of Logar was injured according to the local media. This incident happened on the 16th of March 2009 and according to the provincial Police Chief, General Muhseni, it is still not clear where the shots were fired from that injured the MP. The demonstrators were demanding the release of 6 persons taken away by coalition forces.

According Anis daily of the 22nd of March 2009, President Karzai, signed and issued a security direc-

tive in the presence of the Minister for Defence, Minister for Interior Affairs and the Head of the National Directorate of Security. According to the Minister for Defence, this directive was issued for the establishment of a coordination group between the Afghan security forces and the coalition security forces.

Local media reported the killing of a driver, a cook and two guests in the house of the district Mayor of Imam Sahib in the province of Kunduz. The district governor of Imam Shaib, Juma Khan said to the local media that two coalition helicopters arrived near the house and coalition forces entered the house and killed these persons. According to Mohammad Omar the governor of Kunduz, the people who had gathered in this house were all government employees. He said that this operation was carried by coalition forces from Kabul. Coalition forces confirmed this operation and said that the killed persons were all 'terrorists' and that the coalition forces were assisted by the police in this operation. Local media said that after this incident happened on the 22nd of March 2009, a large number of people demonstrated in protest against these operations and have asked the government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On the 20th of March 2009 – media reported about a resolution of the Ulema Council in Kabul. Based on this resolution the Ulema Council recommends holding a Loya Jirga (Grand Council) to bring peace to Afghanistan. The Ulema have asked the Organization of the Islamic Countries and the UN to remove the names of the opposition persons from the black list, hence, the oppositions can attend the proposed Loya Jirga. The Ulema Council have also asked the King of Saudi Arabia, to chair the Loya

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Jirga and the discussion with opposition groups. Maulawi Qiamudin Kashaf, Deputy of the Ulema Council and its Spokesman said that the Ulema Council is hopeful that the international community will give a positive response to this request and they have asked President Karzai to get the consensus of the neighbouring countries for the convention of this Loya Jirga.

The local media reported on the 29th of March 2009 that since the appointment of the new governor to the western province of Herat, Ahmad Yousuf Nooristani a few months ago, the security situation has improved in this province. Local media continuously complained about the lack of security and governance when the previous governor Sayed Hussain Anwari was the governor of Herat and served there as the governor for more than four years.

After the release of the new US strategy for Afghanistan on the 28th of March 2009, President Karzai called on the UN to remove the names of the Taliban from the black list. The President welcomed the new US strategy and said, 'the new US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is what the Afghan people were asking for'.

Local media reported on the 30th of March 2009 that Kabul Electricity Directorate warned some government ministries that if they don't pay the overdue bills, their electricity will be cut. The mentioned Directorate said that almost one billion Afghanis were owed by some government institutions and ministries.

International Affairs: The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that President Karzai will travel to Tehran, Iran on the 11th of March 2009 and participate in

the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Heads of States conference. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman said to the media that Iran can play a major role in the security of Afghanistan. The Spokesman also said that the narcotics issue will be a major issue in this conference.

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, visited Afghanistan on the 16th of March 2009 and met with President Karzai and Speakers of both houses of the Afghan parliament. Anis daily run an interview on the same day without giving the source of the interview, however, the headline of this interview was: Russian Foreign Minister, 'we are working jointly with the US and are investigating the possibility of carrying projects in the energy and transport sectors'. The next day, the same daily run these headlines: Hamid Karzai stressed development of relations between Afghanistan and Russia in economic, trade and cultural areas. Russian Foreign Minister: Afghanistan is not only a priority for the US but it is also a priority for Russia.

Anis daily published an interview with the Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov on the 18th of March 2009. Here are the highlights of this interview: The current situation of Afghanistan shows that mistakes have been made. Only the Afghan army and police are able to ensure internal and external security for Afghanistan. Every strategy needs to begin with focus on national interest of Afghanistan, next comes the interest of the region and then the interest of the world. Any good and bad that happen in Afghanistan has a direct affect on Central Asia which is a next door neighbour of Russia. If they don't chose a timetable for the withdrawal and revise their strategy, I think the with-

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drawal timetable will be established by itself.

As part of the new-year celebration in the Northern Province of Balkh, where the Foreign Ministers of the three neighbouring countries (Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan) met on the 21st of March 2009, they issued a joint statement about cooperation in area of terrorism, counter narcotics and organized crimes. The three Ministers considered the rail line between Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan as a good example of developing relationship. This rail-line will enter the western city of Herat in Afghanistan from Iran and will be extended via the northern Afghan city of Kunduz to Tajikistan. Media reported that the work inside Iran is almost complete and the work on this rail-line will soon start in Afghanistan.

President Karzai's Spokesman, Humayoun Hamidzada said that the article in the Guardian newspaper about placing the so called Prime Minister next to Karzai was against the constitution of Afghanistan and if there was to be a Prime Minister's post created in the Afghan government, this decision will be made by the Afghan people.

Human Rights: A local Afghan journalist, Jawid Ahmad who was working for a Canadian television channel in Kandahar and spent 11 months in the Bagram prison was killed by unidentified persons on the 10th of March 2009. After the killing of this journalist, a large number of journalists called on the government to seriously conduct an investigation about the issue of who is behind the killings of journalists. Journalists added that the current government has not arrested the killers of journalists killed in the past years. On the same day another journalist working for Ariana television in Kabul

was arrested by the officers of the National Directorate of Security and a local journalist was injured by the coalition forces in Helmand province.

After more than a year's searching, preparation and a Presidential Decree for a commission to find the remains of the First President of Afghanistan Mohammad Daoud Khan, his remains were found last year and were buried along with the remains of some of his close family members on the 17th of March 2009 with full State honour. According to Daoud Khan's sister-in-law, who is believed to be living in England, almost 70 members of Daoud Khan's family members were killed in the April coup of 1978 when a group of communist officers entered the Presidential Palace. Majority of the Afghans believe that the communist coup of April 1978 was the beginning of a dark era for Afghans lasting more than ten years and what came after that on the Afghan people was also linked with that coup and the persons behind that. The four communist Presidents who came after Daoud Khan, all died in inexplicable circumstances.

Environment: Minister of Public Health, Sayed Mohammad Amin Fatemi said to the Environment and Public Welfare Commission of the Upper House that 75% of the children are ill because the environment is unhealthy. He asked relevant government institutions and local Mullahs to assist in cleaning up the environment. Mustafa Zahir, the Head of the National Environment Protection Agency said that the activity of the Ministerial Coordination Committee to prevent air pollution can be effective, however, most of the time only lower ranking officials participate in the meetings of this Committee. The Head of the Kabul Traffic Authority

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said that the city of Kabul has the capacity for 50,000 vehicles but there are more than 400,000 vehicles in use at the Kabul roads out of which 65% are not suitable for usage. He added that in the coming weeks it is expected that well equipped workshops will be established to check vehicles for their road worthiness. In this meeting, the Head of Petroleum Products in the Ministry of Commerce reported about an agreement with three international companies for controlling the quality of petroleum products and added that there will be no petroleum products with lower quality in Afghanistan after six months.