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News

“It is not safe to hold elections” insist MPs

The acting ministers of interior and defense attended the June 16 plenary session to brief MPs on their preparations for the upcoming Parliamentary elections. The ministers attended at the invitation of MPs who are concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the country. Despite being given assurances that districts will be secure enough for elections to go ahead as planned, MPs remained adamant that the prevailing security situation should improve to allow for safe and secure polling.

Mr. Munir Mangal, Acting Minister of Interior, told MPs that of the 364 districts in the country, only nine are completely secure or not under potential threat from insurgent attacks. 114 districts are in high threat areas while 50 and 191 have been assessed as facing medium and low threat levels respectively. Mangal also stated that the MoI was working with other security agencies to reduce the number of districts regarded as under considerable threat. “Of the 6,835 polling centers, 1,912 are in high threat, 298 in medium threat, and 3,840 in low threat levels. These threats may change as we have Operation Omid ahead of us. 45-50 thousand police will operate to ensure security of the elections and ANA reserve units will support the police when required,” added Mr. Mangal. Minister of Defense, Abdul Rahim Wardak, concurred with Mr. Mangal, adding that while 6,835 polling centers have been identified by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), each of the identified locations or centers would be confirmed after visits by a delegation from ISAF and the IEC. Mr. Wardak further advised MPs that the MoD will provide security for candidates, IEC staff, polling centers and the ballot boxes.

MPs were, however, far from convinced of the capacity of the security organs to ensure elections are conducted in a safe environment. “The little hope we had about the prospects of secure elections has been shattered by your briefing,” commented Fatima Aziz (Kunduz). Fazlullah Mujadidi (Logar) concurred, adding that the MPs have lost confidence in the ability of the security institutions to bring the situation under control and subsequently pave the way for secure elections. “I don’t know what magic you will do to secure all these volatile districts in next couple of months,” Mujadidi said.

Concluding the session, H.E. Yunus Qanooni (Kabul), Speaker of the WJ, said MPs are worried about the security and transparency of the elections. “If we can’t secure all the districts of Afghanistan, how can nation-wide elections take place?” he asked. Mr. Qanooni further acknowledged that there was no way in which all provinces could be secured in time for the September elections. He, however, suggested that the government convene a meeting with MPs and the international community among other stakeholders to explore ways in which the elections could be conducted in a safe and transparent manner.

Wolesi Jirga resumes ‘silent protest’

WJ members have resumed their protest aimed at pressuring the government to respect the Constitution and Parliament. Since May 22, members have sat quietly in protest, refraining from undertaking their legislative duties. Three of the MPs’ original four demands remain unaddressed. They are: submission of fundamental government policies to the National Assembly; submission of the outstanding list of Cabinet nominees for Assembly consideration; and the appearance of the second vice president in his capacity as chairman of the Emergency Response Committee to address MPs’ concerns over the government’s handling of recent flooding. The fourth demand, submission of nominees to the Commission on Oversight of Implementation of the Constitution, was met last week, as reported.

“Our protest continues. Has anybody changed their minds?” asked H.E. Speaker Yunus Qanooni (Kabul) at the start of the plenary session on June 19. Despite no indications to the contrary, Speaker Qanooni requested members to consider discussing the government’s reconciliation efforts with the Taliban. “Reconciliation is a necessity; we want to move towards it. But moving towards Pakistan is quite another thing. We have to discuss this, only if you agree.” The MPs decided to discuss the government’s reconciliation issue on Wednesday, June 23.

Questions have been raised on the effectiveness of the protest. The government is yet to comply with all WJ demands and members have paused their protest to deal with issues they deem of national interest. On June 7th, MPs decided to break their protest to respond to the issue of Christian proselytizing in the country, consider the government’s list of nominees to the Commission of Oversight and Implementation of the Constitution, and the security situation ahead of Parliamentary elections.

Complaining about the apparent inconsistencies in the execution of the WJ protest, Sultan Mohammad Orang (Badakhshan) said, “The board of directors one day drags us towards a protest and another day towards another direction. No prestige is left for us”. Orang added that MPs must remain steadfast in their decision to boycott their legislative duties and not change their stance every day. Kabir Ranjbar (Kabul) concurred, adding, “I had proposed not to include anything in the agenda except our demands of the government. Who granted the Administrative Board the right to add any issue to the agenda?” Ranjbar further suggested

that MPs adhere to their initial decisions not to include any issue in the agenda until the government complies with their demands.

Some MPs have, however, defended the decision to break the protest with the view of discussing 'important issues' as they arise. In their view, issues relating to Christian proselytizing, security of forthcoming elections, and the government nominees to the constitutional oversight commission require WJ's immediate attention.

Legislation

No activity to report for the period.