



Legislative Newsletter

27 February 2011, Vol. 5, No. 04

NEWS:

Wolesi Jirga Elects Speaker.

Hajj Abdul Rauf Ibrahimimi (Kunduz) was today elected as speaker of the Wolesi Jirga (WJ). His election ends a month of unsuccessful attempts by the House to choose a permanent speaker. An ethnic Uzbek and former border commander in Kunduz province, Ibrahimimi received 169 affirmative votes cast from the 173 members present. Today's vote accords with the third recommendation of the ad hoc committee set up to resolve the impasse that delayed the selection of a speaker for the past month. In a departure from previous practice of secret balloting, today's vote was open.

On 19 February the WJ had set up an ad hoc committee to recommend a solution to the deadlock on the speaker's election. The committee, chaired by Mr. Hajji Mohammad Mohaqiq (Kabul), subsequently met and considered the following solutions:

1. That the issue be referred to the Independent Commission on Oversight and Implementation of the Constitution
2. Amend Article 8 of the WJ Internal Rules of Procedure to address the circumstance when no candidate for speaker achieves a 50% plus one majority vote by the second round of voting
3. If the above two options are not supported by the majority of members, the WJ should give the vote to a minority candidate from Uzbek Community

Reporting to the plenary on 27 February, Mr. Mohaqiq said the committee had not engaged in any substantive debate and failed to come to agreement on the first and second proposals. The third proposal was considered by the committee to be the most viable option.

Heated debate resulted in the resignation of interim Speaker Mr. Mohammad Sarwar Usmani (Farah) following the presentation by Mr. Mohaqiq. Mr. Usmani announced his resignation, explaining that he was "under a lot of pressure," and was not being respected. His resignation came after charges that he failed to steer the debate appropriately. Questioning his effectiveness, Mr. Sher Wali Wardak (Maidan Wardak), said "Why are you not reading out drafts submitted by the commission and calling for a vote on the proposals?" Mr. Usmani had suggested a fresh election with three new candidates. After further debate, WJ members agreed to adopt the third proposal. A new interim speaker, Mr. Khudaidad Erifani (Ghazni) was selected, and Mr. Abdulsatar Darzabi (Jawzjan) presented Hajj Abdul Rauf Ibrahimimi (Kunduz) as the Uzbek candidate. An open vote was then conducted for the sole candidate which saw Mr. Ibrahimimi being elected as speaker with 169 votes, out of the 173 cast.

The election of Mr. Ibrahimimi was hailed by all the main contenders of previous failed ballots to elect a speaker. Former WJ Speaker, Mr. Younis Qanooni (Kabul), called the election of Mr. Ibrahimimi "historic and a landmark decision by the WJ." He pledged to share his experiences from the last five years with the new speaker. Mr. Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf (Kabul), who was not in the House at the time of the vote, offered Mr. Ibrahimimi his congratulations via telephone, which was played on

speakerphone for the entire plenary to hear. Mr. Mohaqiq (Kabul), Sadiq Usmani (Parwan) and Shukria Barakzai (Kabul) all joined a series of MPs who took turns congratulating the new speaker and declaring their confidence in his ability.

Upper House Reviews 1390 National Budget

The 1390 National Budget was “imbalanced and incomplete” and did not support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) benchmarks and priorities according to some Senators during the 22 February plenary session of the Meshrano Jirga.

Reviewing the 1390 National Budget during the plenary session, Senators expressed concern with a perceived imbalance in the allocation of resources to provinces and ministries. “There is no balance between the resources allocated to different provinces. The Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Refugees were not given enough funds in this budget,” said Finance and Budget Committee Chairman Mr. Malawi Abdul Wahab Erfan (Takhar). The remarks were directed to Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhelwal, Minister of Finance (MoF) who was called upon by the Senators to address their concerns about the government’s proposed budget.

Mr. Erfan further questioned a decrease of 41% in the proposed development budget and insufficient funds to tackle Kabul’s environmental challenges. “The budget neglects Kabul environment and funds were not allocated to alleviate this problem,” complained Mr. Erfan.

Responding to the Senators’ questions, Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhelwal said his ministry had a discretionary budget of \$325 million which would be divided between provinces. “I am sure that amount is not enough, but considering the capacity of various departments to spend it, it was a fair amount.”

Dr. Zakhailwal further explained that his ministry had to address the most urgent priorities. “We have infinite wants but scarce resources. We have to strike a balance,” said Dr. Zakhailwal. He also blamed “low capacity of the ministries and private companies that implement projects, as well as security issues in some provinces which impact mega projects” for the decline in the developmental budget.

In the last two years, MPs have consistently criticized the budget submitted by the MoF for failing to reflect the priorities set forth in the Afghan National Development Strategy. As a result, Parliament has consistently delayed passage of the government’s proposed budgets in recent years as MPs have sought revisions prior to final enactment.

By law, Senators have until 25 February to send the government’s budget with an advisory note to the Wolesi Jirga (WJ). It is not clear if the MJ will comply with that deadline or delay submission until the WJ selects new leadership. .

1390 Budget Highlights

Following approval by the cabinet, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) presented the government's proposed 1390 budget to Parliament for approval on 8 February.

The proposed budget totals \$4.594 billion USD allocates \$3.192 billion to the operational budget and \$1.402 billion to the development budget. The operational¹ budget accounts for 69.4% of the total budget. While the operational budget has increased from \$2.397 billion in 1389, the development budget was decreased by 41%² for the second year in a row.

The security sector accounts for the bulk of the operating budget with \$1839.07 billion USD. The education sector has the second highest allocation of \$533.84 billion USD.

Domestic revenue is expected to be about \$1.978 billion USD, will finance 43.07% of the total budget. The development budget, divided into discretionary (25%) and non-discretionary funds (75%) is funded by international donors. Allocations for infrastructure development and Agriculture and MRRD (USD493 million and USD350 million) both account for about 60.01% of the total development budget.

By law, the National Assembly has 45 days to approve or reject the budget. The Meshrano Jirga should complete its review within 15 days of receiving the budget, scheduled for 27 February. The Senators, after scrutinizing the budget, are required to send it to the WJ with an advisory note. The WJ then has 30 days to either approve or reject the budget.³

Appointed Senators Sworn In

Second Vice President H.E. Karim Khalili swore in 34 newly appointed Senators during the 26 plenary session of the Meshrano Jirga (MJ). The new Senators were appointed by President Karzai last week to serve a five-year term. MJ Speaker Fazal Hadi Muslimyar welcomed his new colleagues and stressed the need for Senators to work together, "MJ is thankful to President Karzai for introducing intellectuals, wise and honest people from across the country to serve as senators." He encouraged all senators to cooperate and work together.

Second Vice President Khalili emphasized the need for Senators to work together and remain loyal to their cause. "There is a need to work together in order to face challenges. I pray to Allah that Senators and all of us should be loyal and honest with our country."

¹ Operating budget includes salaries, goods& services, acquisition of asserts and other. Salaries account for 73.08% of the operating budget, goods& services 13.37%, other 11.6% and acquisition of asserts 1.95% in the 1390 draft budget

² Development budget allocation was USD2045 billion in 1389

³ Please visit http://sunyaf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=56 to access detailed highlights of the 1390 budget.