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# Legislative Newsletter

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## NEWS

### **MP Continue Focusing on Oversight**

Although oversight issues were not a reason cited by MPs for their delayed summer recess, three senior Executive officials nonetheless reported to the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) this week. MPs were frustrated, however, that they were not allowed to question the officials after they made presentations during the WJ's plenary sessions.

During the WJ's plenary session on 16 July, Mr. Muhibullah Safi, deputy and acting governor of Afghanistan Bank, was invited to report about the state of Azizi Bank. MPs had earlier expressed their "profound" concerns about Azizi Bank and had claimed that it was on the "verge of collapse". (See *APAP Newsletter of 14 July*)

Mr. Safi, however, brushed aside those concerns and assured the legislators that Azizi Bank had never been through any sort of crisis. "Using the term 'crisis' to describe the situation of Azizi Bank was inappropriate." argued Mr. Safi.

There were many MPs who wanted to question Mr. Safi but they were not allowed to ask any questions following Mr. Safi's presentation. Despite the ban on questions, Mr. Mohammad Rafiq Shahir (Herat) still raised his red card and yelled a comment that took Mr. Safi by surprise. "You have described the financial situation of Azizi Bank as if nothing is wrong with it at all; well I hope that is the case. But if it does collapse, you will probably leave the country and then, who are we going to hold accountable for that?" questioned Mr. Shahir.

Mr. Shahir did not get the answer to his question but his comments reflected the growing concern that some of the MPs have concerning the financial state of Azizi Bank. Despite several attempts by other MPs who raised their red cards to speak, none were allowed to voice their objections.

Ms. Nahid Ahmad Farid (Herat) was one of those frustrated MPs who was not allowed to ask any questions. In an interview with Afghan Parliamentary Assistance Program (APAP) on the same day, she expressed her disappointment at not being able to ask questions. "I wanted to ask him [Mr. Safi] about the crisis between IMF and the Ministry of Finance. I understand that it's about the financial state of Azizi Bank. If the IMF stops its assistance, who will pay civil servant salaries?" she asked.

Continuing with the oversight agenda, the WJ invited Mr. Wahidullah Shahrani, Minister of Mines on 17 July and Mr. Abdul Qudus Hamidi, Minister of Public Works, on 20 July, to update the house on the state of affairs in their relevant departments. As it was the case with the acting governor of Afghanistan Bank, MPs were not allowed to ask questions from these Ministers either. Some MPs were again frustrated with the ban on questions and claimed that there was no point in hearing the officials' reports.

Speaking in the plenary of 16 July, Mr. Muhammad Reza Khoshak Watandust (Herat) said: "If we are not to hold question and answer sessions with them, they might as well send their reports to the print media and we will read it out of their pages." Mr. Gholam Faruq Majroh (Herat) agreed with his colleague and added: "It is a waste of our time and their time to just be here and report to us."

It may not be the last time these officials were invited to the WJ, as Ms. Farid said: "I am going to collect signatures of my colleagues to invite the acting governor of Kabul Bank to the plenary again. This time it will be to hold a question and answer session."

## **MPs Concerned about Security**

After Mr. Hashim Watanwal, an MP from southern province of Uruzgan was assassinated together with Mr. Jan Mohammad, an advisor to the president, on 17 July in Kabul, MPs expressed growing concerns about security.

MPs invited Minister of Interior Mr. Bismilah Mohammadi and Dr. Mohammad Yasin Zia, Deputy Director of National Directorate of Security (NDS), to the Wolesi Jirga's (WJ) plenary session on 19 July to present a briefing about the current security situation generally, and specifically about the assassination of Mr. Watanwal.

Due to the security concerns, the media was asked to leave the WJ and the plenary was convened behind the closed doors. Mr. Mohammad Lalai Hameedzai, an MP from Kandahar, who was present in the plenary later told local media that security officials had warned them that "all MPs faced real threat." Although Mr. Hameedzai believes that the Taliban are responsible for the assassinations, other MPs asked for an investigation into the matter.

"The assassinations of national figures have raised serious questions and I think there are secret hands behind the assassination of Mr. Jan Mohammad and Mr. Watanwal. We have to know whether they were assassinated by the Taliban or someone else." Mr. Neli Sadeqizadah (Dikundi) said.

"Regardless of who is responsible, the threat is real," says Mr. Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, an MP from Kabul. In an interview with Afghan Parliamentary Assistance Program (APAP) Mr. Balkhi said: "Each MP can have up to a maximum of four bodyguards; that is not enough. They can't guard around the clock."

WJ Second Deputy Speaker Mr. Ahmad Shah Behzad (Herat) also expressed his concerns and said that the security personnel in the WJ was instructed to take extra precautions. “We had a meeting with the security department of the National Assembly (NA) on Wednesday. They have geared up the measures around the NA building.” said Mr. Behzad in an interview with APAP.

## **WJ Condemns Civilian Casualties**

On 17 July, Wolesi Jirga (WJ) issued a media release condemning the civilian casualties with “severest possible terms” and called for an immediate end to them. The original media release drafted on 16 July was in direct response to civilian casualties inflicted by ISAF forces in Kunar province but made no mention of deaths caused by the Taliban. Some MPs objected to that omission and called on the leadership of the WJ to reference the Taliban in the release as they were responsible for many more civilian casualties.

Mr. Khalid Pashtoon (Kandahar), First Deputy Speaker of WJ, was the first MP to express his objection. “Any loss of life is regrettable and must be prevented. But as we all know the Taliban are responsible for 80 % of all civilian casualties. We must mention that too or else we will sound biased.” argued Mr. Pashtoon

Ms. Fawzia Kofi (Badakhshan) agreed with Mr. Pashtoon, saying, “The fact that we ignore casualties inflicted by the Taliban, while we condemn those from the hands of ISAF, means we are giving legitimacy to the Taliban.”

Mr. Baktash Siavash (Kabul) not only agreed with the proposal to include Taliban “atrocities” in the media release, but even went further to condemn the UN Security Council for removing the names of fourteen Taliban members from their black list. “The UN announced a few days ago that the Taliban are responsible for 80% of all civilian casualties. Only two days later, they removed names of the perpetrators of all those deaths, practically rewarding them for their atrocities.”

Not all MPs agreed with the proposal to include the Taliban in the media release. “When the Taliban kill, we have no complaint. That’s because they are enemies. But when ISAF forces kill, we have to condemn it, because they are not our enemies, they have supposedly come to help,” argued Mr. Alhaj Nawab Mangal (Paktia). In response to Mr. Mangal’s comment, Mr. Pashtoon argued for the second time that it was not only right but also necessary to include all civilian casualties, “I represent a province that has suffered the most number of civilian casualties, make no mistake of that, but our media release will have no impact if we don’t strike a balance.”

The final revised version of media release condemned all civilian casualties.

## **Acronyms**

MJ Meshrano Jirga  
NA National Assembly  
WJ Wolesi Jirga