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NEWS

Lower House Begins Silent Protest

On 11 June, the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) began a silent protest, demanding the government's outstanding list of nominees for all the posts that require WJ's approval. According to Article 64¹ of the Afghan Constitution, the WJ must approve appointments for Cabinet Ministers, the Attorney General, the Director of the Central Bank, the Head of the National Security Directorate and the President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society..

Speaker of the WJ, Mr. Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi (Kunduz), said that the MPs will continue with their silent protest until the remaining ministerial nominees, three remaining Supreme Court judges, independent general directorates and the two remaining members of the Commission on Oversight over the Implementation of the Constitution were sent to the Lower House. "Our protest will continue until our demands are met." added Speaker Ibrahimi.

Silent protest is not unprecedented in the WJ. During the last legislative term, MPs protested in silence for similar reasons. During their silent protest, MPs would refrain from discussion and would bang on the tables every five minutes. Although no one is sure whether the silent protest would be successful, almost all MPs present in the house remained committed to observing it. Mr. Ahmad Shah Ramazan (Balkh) was the only MP who tried to speak against the method of their protest but was soon asked to stop talking by fellow MPs.

The WJ passed the Acting Ministers Law in December 2009 limiting to one month the period of time an acting minister may serve in an acting capacity. Currently there are acting ministers who have served in that capacity since President Karzai won the 2009 presidential election.

¹ Article 53, clause 11 of the Afghan Constitution in regards to the authorities of the Wolesi Jirga states: "Appointing of Ministers, the Attorney General, the Director of the Central Bank, Head of the National Security Directorate and the President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society with the approval of the Wolesi Jirga, and acceptance of their dismissal and resignation."

MPs Assess Impact of Silent Protest

After protesting in silence for five consecutive days, the MPs in the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) are wondering whether their “soft approach” has been effective. Lower House lawmakers delayed their summer recess on 5 June for fifteen days in order to address pressing national issues. Putting pressure on the government to submit the list of minister-designates, three judges of the Supreme Court and other senior officials, was on top of their list. MPs opted to express their frustration with a silent protest, occasionally interrupted by pounding their fists on the tables, in an attempt to persuade the government to submit the list of nominees. To date, the government has not responded to their demands.

Frustrated that the government is not taking heed of their protest, Mr. Muhammad Ibrahim Qasemi (Kabul) urged his fellow MPs on 15 June to end their protest and go for their summer recess. “Let’s make today the last day of our silent protest and go for our summer recess. When we come back, we will decide to do something serious.” said Mr. Qasemi.

The notion of ending the silent protest was raised by Mr. Khalid Pashtoon (Kandahar), First Deputy Speaker of the WJ, who asked his colleagues: “Whether or not you want to continue with it [silent protest] when we return next week, is a question I would like to ask you now.”

There are some MPs who have called on the WJ to take firmer action and believe that the silent protest will not achieve anything. They are angry and proposed dramatic solutions. “This drumming [referring to the fact that MPs bang on the tables occasionally while observing silence] will achieve nothing except that it has turned us into expert drummers,” joked Ahmad Shah Ramazan (Balkh) during the plenary session of 14 June. “This government is rotten and will collapse tomorrow, if not today. I suggest we all go to our provinces and start removing provincial government officials. Then the government will listen to us.” continued Mr. Ramazan.

Mr. Ramazan is not the only MP who believes in dramatic solutions. Mr. Sadeqizadah Neli (Dikundi) called on the house to summon the Minister of Finance and instruct him to take fiscal action. “I propose that we cut off the budget of all those ministries that are led by acting ministers. We are not looking for confrontation; we want the government to listen to us.” explained Mr. Neli.

There are other MPs who believe that, regardless of the silent protest’s impact, it is necessary to continue with it because changing the course midway would be humiliating for them.

“We will continue with our protest even if there were only a few of us left.” announced Mr. Obaidullah Ramin (Baghlan) Mr. Ramin’s sentiments were welcomed by many of his colleagues, especially Mr. Mohammad Sarwar Usmani Farahi (Farah) who said: “Our decisions must be firm and strong. We can’t falter. Without getting a result, it will be a disgrace to leave the field and give up. People will not count on us in future.”

The WJ currently scheduled to begin recess on 21 June.

Acronyms

MJ	Meshrano Jirga
NA	National Assembly
WJ	Wolesi Jirga