

Legislative Newsletter

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NEWS:

MPs Briefed on Winter Season Preparations

Representatives of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Committee attended the 28 September Wolesi Jirga (WJ) plenary session to brief legislators on preparations for the upcoming winter season. The Committee also updated MPs on efforts to provide food aid to people affected by drought. Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy (Kunduz), Wolesi Jirga Speaker chaired the meeting.

In his brief to the plenary, the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Mr. Mohammad Asif Rahimi said his ministry was doing all it could to help persons affected by the drought. “We need to consider two things here: what we can do as the Afghan government and the role of the international community in assisting Afghans?” Minister Rahimi informed members that his ministry has done most of the ground work in alleviating the effects of drought. “We already have 40,000 tons of wheat in our stocks and will distribute these for free to the people in need. We are expecting an additional 250,000 tons from India to be distributed to people in need. Also, 20,000 tons of compressed stock feed for livestock and 10,000 tons of improved seeds will be immediately distributed to farmers. On top of that, 5,000 tons of rice will be distributed to 200,000 families in 14 provinces,” he said.

Minister Rahimi informed the House that transportation of these items to the needy provinces is currently underway. “We hope we can reach our targets on time,” he said, adding that the Ministry welcomes lawmakers’ involvement and participation in the distribution of these commodities in the provinces. On the role of the international community, the Minister said that discussions with the UN agencies are continuing and his ministry will launch an appeal for international assistance. “We will ask for US\$596 million in our appeal. US\$142 million will be used specifically for drought-related issues.”

Ms. Soraya Dalil, the Acting Minister of Public Health, apprised the House on her Ministry’s activities. “Two main categories of our work target issues of health and nutrition,” said Ms Dalil. On health, she said improving children’s protection against diseases, especially measles and diarrhea, has been targeted by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). “Our programs and quantities of medication for such diseases have been pre-positioned in different provinces. Our capacities are, however, limited by a lack funds to provide them for the entire nation.” She added that US\$2.7 million from the appeal referred to by Minister Rahimi would be dedicated to purchasing drugs and providing training.

The Deputy Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Engineer Wais Ahmad said that they have two pillars to deal with: first, risk reduction such as road clearance and distribution of safe drinking water; secondly, reconstruction, including construction of bridges and food items through work-for-food programs.

Responding to the briefs by the government officials, some MPs questioned the quality of the seeds distributed to farmers. According to them, seeds distributed in the past did not give good yields. “What is the Ministry of Agriculture’s plan to deal with this problem?” asked Mr. Saranwal Abdurraouf (Badakhshan).

Several MPs raised questions about existing health and nutrition problems in Kandahar, Ghor, Faryab provinces and the Kuchis. They further asked the government officials to explain their plans to deal with those issues. Other MPs questioned how the government planned to distribute food aid to areas not easily accessible by road, especially during the winter season when there are heavy snow falls. “What are the Ministry of Public Health’s plans to stop the spread of such diseases as polio from neighboring countries, especially from Pakistan? Some diseases like diarrhea are epidemic after floods. What are the plans to prevent such problems?” asked Shukria Barakzai (Kabul).

In response, Minister Rahimi said the MoA has improved its oversight over the production of improved seeds with the cooperation of the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry’s laboratories. “However, there is a possibility of fraud in distribution of seeds,” he said, adding that Ghor province has been surveyed and the MoA is working on sending food items to ‘highland provinces as soon as possible to avoid road closures during the winter time. The Minister said he will be meeting with Kuchi representatives in the near future to discuss the Ministry’s plans to provide special services to them.

Minister Dalil added, “We have always tried to use opportunities to offer health services in those districts of Kandahar plagued with security challenges when the risk is low.” She added that the MoPH has established some clinics and uses mobile clinics to serve people in insecure areas. “We are trying to have more mutual coordination and cooperation with Pakistan. The recent polio campaign is a good example where both countries had simultaneous campaigns for better effectiveness purposes. Seasonal diseases are considered in the Ministry’s work plan and we are trying to pay attention to the outbreak trends of such diseases,” she said.

Senators Call for International Probe into Prof Rabani’s Murder

The Meshrano Jirga plenary session on 25 September called for establishment of an International Truth Finding Commission, comprised of the UN, NATO and Afghan officials to investigate Professor Burhanudeen Rabani’s murder. Condemning the murder Mr. Mohammad Alam Izedyar (Panjshir), the First Deputy Speaker of the House said, “This act of terrorism and plot of enemies of the nation needs thorough investigation. Such an investigation shall be at international level due to involvement of foreign hands.” Mr. Izedyar added that political and diplomatic channels must be effectively used to deal with this issue and prevent similar attacks.

Supporting Mr. Izedyar’s allegation of “foreign involvement” Mr. Khaleqdad Balaghi (Kabul) said, “The weakness of our security organs is evident, and reality proves that foreigners and traitors are involved in the plot.” He further proposed that security officials convene to examine the incident. “How come the first deputy chair of the High Peace Council was not aware of the meeting of Professor Rabani with the suicide attacker?” Mr. Balaghi asked. Mr. Abdulhanan Haqwayoon (Paktia) urged Senators to assess whether mistakes are intentional. He disagreed with the idea of the security officials resigning, saying: “Resignation of security officials shall not be a good solution to our security problems . . . we have to expect our security organs to perform according to their capabilities and capacities.

Senator Mawlawi Abdulwahab Irfan (Takhar) said while the entire nation is keen for peace, the mechanism and ways of pursuing peace by the government have been full of flaws and problems, and therefore, not approved by the nation or their representatives in the National Assembly, “MPs still do not know with whom and to which address this peace is going to be made,” Senator Irfan said, adding, “If true peace is to be made, it should avoid the existing ambiguities and be transparent.” Senator Irfan asked for a “thorough revision” of the peace process and “stronger diplomacy” towards Pakistan, which is seriously interfering in Afghanistan.

Mr. Rafiullah Haidari (Kunar) said that the enemy had two objectives from this act of terror -- first to kill Ustad Rabani, and second to create more tension and enmity among Afghans. “They achieved their first objective, but we must not let them achieve their second objective,” Mr. Haidari added. He also highlighted the continuing tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, saying that around 250 rockets were launched on Afghanistan’s Kunar province from Pakistani. Mr. Haidari asked security officials to pay attention to this very important issue of Afghan national security and sovereignty.

Dr. Hazrat Shah Nooristani (Nuristan) also informed Senators about an incident that happened four days ago in Waigul district of Nuristan province. According to Mr. Nooristani, “A night operation was carried out in the area by the ANA and American forces without the coordination of the provincial administration that resulted in the death of four Taliban fighters along with 19 civilians.” He condemned such attacks that lead to civilian casualties, and asked the government to provide financial assistance to the families of the civilians killed.

Senators Condemn Pakistan for Afghan Deaths

On September 27, Senators condemned Pakistan for the shelling of Afghanistan from Pakistan that has resulted in the death of many Afghans. The Upper House also accused Pakistan of illegally occupying up to 3km of Afghan land and resolved to request the UN Security Council to intervene on behalf of Afghanistan.

“The Afghan nation is ready for any kind of sacrifice to defend her homeland, as it has proved throughout the course of history,” said Mr. Fazel Hadi Muslimyar, the Meshrano Jirga (MJ) Speaker opening the session.

Senator Haji Mohammad Amin (Kunar) blamed the ISI of Pakistan for most of the Afghan woes. “They are supporting terrorist networks and suicide attacks in our country,” he said, adding that Pakistan has proved that it has never been a true friend to Afghanistan.

Senator Hazrat Shah Nooristani (Nuristan) said that the Afghan territorial integrity and national sovereignty have been violated by neighboring countries but the Afghan government and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are yet to respond appropriately. “The Pakistani military has appropriated around 3 kilometers of our soil and has moved its check points into our soil.” Mr Mawlawi Danishjo (Balkh) concurred, adding that Pakistan has had a hostile policy towards Afghanistan and always tried to dominate the country. “Afghanistan needs to react in the same nature and vigor against these shameless and inhumane attacks,” he said. Mr. Danishjo further criticized the use of foreign currencies in the country and proposed a ban on use of foreign currency and enactment of stronger financial policies by the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance to curb the problem.

Some senators, notably Mr. Khaleqdad Balaghi (Kabul) attributed Pakistan's hostility towards Afghanistan to the good relations between Kabul and New Delhi. "The good relationship between Afghanistan and India is one of the main reasons Pakistan is hostile toward us," said Mr. Balaghi.

Senator Mohammad Alam Izedyar (Panjshir), First Deputy Speaker of the House, pointed to "foreign intervention" as the main cause of insecurity in the country. "Pakistan is also a source of the crisis in Afghanistan. I suggest the three branches of government should revise their strategies toward this hostile country, remove ambiguities in our plan to move forward and make a clear, decisive and strong policy." He added that Afghanistan should take advantage of the international community's engagement in the country and use it to its advantage.

The House agreed with Mr. Izedyar's suggestion that the Upper House sends an open letter to the UN Security Council through the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking redress. "There is undeniable evidence that proves Pakistan's overt hostility towards Afghanistan, and the UN Security Council must urgently consider Pakistan's attacks on our soil as an evident breach of international law," he said.