

Legislative Newsletter

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NEWS:

Wolesi Jirga Call for Dismissal of Security officials

Wolesi Jirga (WJ) members on 14 September condemned recent insurgent attacks in Kabul City and called on security officials to step aside if they are not able to protect citizens. Speaking in the plenary session a day after Kabul witnessed four suicide attacks in different parts of the city and a prolonged gun battle between insurgents and security forces, WJ Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy (Kunduz) called on security officials to protect Afghan citizens.

“We condemn the insurgent attacks in different parts of Kabul yesterday, the terrorists’ attacks put the lives of the Afghan public in danger,” Speaker Ibrahimy said. MPs questioned how the Afghan security officials manning the various checkpoints across Kabul failed to detect and stop insurgents from bringing weapons into the city. “The Ministry of Interior staff is appointed based on personal relations or after paying bribes... I believe these insurgents came to the city in security vehicles” said Abdul Rahim Ayoubi (Kandahar). Mohammad Sabir (Kuchi) concurred, adding: “I do not know how it is possible to bring so many light and heavy weapons to the heart of Kabul, without assistance from the security sector.”

Some MPs attributed the deteriorating security situation in the country and the recent terrorist attacks to neighboring countries and the proposed Afghan-US Strategic Partnership. “The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence is behind these terrorist attacks and target killings. They are not happy about the proposed strategic agreement with the US,” said Daoud Kalakani (Kabul).

Gholam Faruq Majroh (Herat) said the recent incidents have caused great concern among the people, “No one feels safe in this country. Who is protecting and responsible for the lives of the workers, the drivers and students killed in yesterday’s incident? The security officials should accept their shortcomings and resign from their jobs. If they are not ready to resign, the WJ should think of their interpellation.”

At the end of the plenary, MPs decided to invite security officials, the Minister of Urban Development Affairs and the mayor of Kabul to the next plenary session to respond to legislators’ questions relating to security in the capital and efforts by the council to ensure the half finished and multi-storied buildings in Kabul are completed.

Wolesi Jirga appoints delegation to reconcile with ‘Coalition’

The Wolesi Jirga (WJ) on 10 September assigned a delegation of 11 legislators to negotiate with their dissatisfied colleagues and bring them back to the House. Reportedly, more than 100 members of the Coalition for Law Support (Coalition) boycotted the House plenary session protesting the decision of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to replace their nine colleagues with new MPs.

After the swearing in ceremony of a new member, Nisar Ahmad Faizi Ghoryani (Herat) who was absent when his eight colleagues took their oath of office, the WJ was divided with some legislators saying that the WJ elections debate was over but others suggested that it was necessary to negotiate with the Coalition. “We should not discuss election results anymore, this debate is over . . . the Admin Board should invite Coalition members and not negotiate the election result with them,” said Mr. Mohammad Noor Akbari (Daikundi).

But many MPs who disagreed with Mr. Akbari said that legislators should bolster unity by playing their role in national debates on such issues as Qatia (annual financial report), the budget, lack of implementation of development projects, high ticket prices of domestic flights and rising cost of food among others. “Government is enjoying the tension gripping the WJ and ministers do not wish to see a united Parliament . . . We should end the tensions in the House to discuss Qatia and implementation of the development budget,” said, Mr. Abdul Sattar Khawasi (Parwan). Echoing Mr. Khawasi’s comments, Mr. Sediq Ahmad Usmani (Parwan) also added that Coalition members should come and take part in WJ sessions. “The World Bank stopped its assistance to Afghanistan due to the Kabul Bank crisis and it convinced other countries not to provide aid to Afghanistan. The WJ should summon the Minister of Finance and the Director of the Afghanistan Bank to update the House regarding this issue, otherwise after two or three months the government will not be able to pay salaries for police, ANA and teachers,” he said.

Mr. Sayed Husain Anwari (Kabul) indirectly criticized those MPs who were stoking tension between the three pillars of the state, claiming that, until the Coalition is convinced to come back to the House, the WJ will not have a quorum to pass decisions. “My discontent is with those MPs who played with the emotions of some people and have now retreated from their position,” said Mr Anwari, He added that there is no rule of law in the country to punish the guilty. “Mr. Fazal Ahmad Manawee (IEC Chairman) should be tried because he played with the national identity. He is responsible for the current political crisis within the House,” he said, echoing a similar statement by Ms. Shukria Barakzai (Kabul) during the WJ’s last plenary when she accused Mr. Manawee of “changing results” of the WJ election and “insulting” the vote of the people.

Opposing Mr. Anwari was Hajji Mohammad Muhageq, a former Jihadi leader and MP representing Kabul province, who argued that the presence of nine new MPs is legitimate and in line with the Afghan Constitution. “The decision of Mr. Manawee was legal. We should negotiate with the MPs who are on strike in order to bring them back to the House,” he said. He added that the creation of the Special Elections Court was illegal and MPs opposed it. “Mr. Fazal Ahmad Manawee (IEC Chairman) resisted government pressures and he was nearly arrested if the international community had not interfered in time.”

MPs were concerned that without the return of Coalition members, WJ plenary sessions and committee meetings would not have the required quorum. “The best platform to solve the issues is the Parliament . . . committee quorums are always incomplete and sometimes the committees do not hold their sessions,” said Ms. Barakzai.

Concurring with Ms. Barakzai, another representative of Kabul province Mr. Jafar Mahdawee said, “In the past four months the WJ’s quorum has been incomplete. The Afghan National Assembly has three major duties: legislation, oversight and representation. If the quorum is incomplete, how can we perform our primary tasks?” He also pointed out that the forthcoming national budget should be discussed to prioritize important projects.

The WJ formed a delegation to negotiate with the angry MPs, however at the same time, the Coalition held a separate meeting outside Parliament trying to prevent completion of the WJ quorum. Talking to the media, a member of the Coalition, Mr. Abdul Qauom Sajjadi said that the Coalition was trying to prevent the WJ from attaining a quorum. Meanwhile the head of the Coalition, Hajji Zahir Qadeer referred to the new MPs as government appointees and insisted that the Coalition will not consider the newly “appointed MPs” as legal.

Senate briefed on Afghan-US Strategic Partnership

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Zalmai Rasoul and Presidential Security Advisor Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta attended the Meshrano Jirga plenary session on 13 September to update Senators on the proposed Afghan-US strategic partnership. The two officials informed members that negotiations between Kabul and Washington are ongoing and once completed the strategic agreement will be sent to the National Assembly for ratification.

“Three rounds of negotiations have been held. Negotiations are continuing with both countries bargaining for their national interest. The National Assembly (NA) will receive the agreement for ratification,” Mr. Spanta said. He added that the two countries have reached an agreement on four key points, “So far we have discussed and agreed on four issues: strengthening the Afghan security forces after 2014, economical development, strengthening governmental institutions and improving Afghanistan’s international and regional trade. We will however hold further discussions on issues to bring foreign troops under a national legal framework and closing foreign prisons.”

In response to the briefing, some Senators advocated for National Assembly members to be involved in the drafting of the bilateral agreement, “This issue [Strategic Partnership Agreement] is very important. We should protect our interests. Before the agreement is finalized it would be better if the government shares it with members of both Houses of the National Assembly to include their views,” said Farukh Shah Jenab (Faryab).

A number of Senators raised questions related to concerns about neighboring countries and their efforts to derail the negotiation process. “Some neighboring countries are trying to stop Afghanistan from signing this agreement. What do you think about this issue?” asked Najiba Husaini (Daikundi).

In response Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Zalmai Rasoul informed members that no country will impose its will on Kabul. “I know about the concerns of neighboring countries concerning this agreement. The Iranian government expressed their stance in the media and contacted the Afghan government several times about the agreement. We should show our neighbors that we are a sovereign nation and no country has the right to dictate with which countries we should cooperate. Our neighbors do not have the right to interfere in Afghanistan’s internal affairs”.

Senators Quiz Minister over “Immoral” Television Broadcasts

The Minister of Information and Culture (MoIC), Mr. Sayed Makhdom Rahin, briefed the 11 September plenary session of the Meshrano Jirga (MJ) on television entertainment programs and their disregard of Afghan cultural values. The Senators labeled some private television station programs culturally insensitive and immoral. They asked the MoIC to take appropriate steps to ban those programs which advertise insensitive materials that harm Islamic values.

According to Mr. Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, Speaker of the MJ, people are concerned with the "half-naked dancers" and immoral soap operas run by private television stations. "The media is independent and independence does not mean extending strangers' culture into the country," said Mr. Muslimyar. He further added that every day deaths are occurring across the country yet local television channels were screening videos of half-naked musicians. "The MoIC should immediately take steps to stop immoral programs," he said.

Supporting Speaker Muslimyar's views, many of the Senators called for a ban on such immoral programs. "Private channels broadcast films and videos involving half-naked actors and dancers in the holy month of Ramadan, which is against Islamic and Afghan values. Is it necessary to broadcast such films and dances as well as immoral drama series on Eid days?" asked, Mr. Mohammed Sayed (Wardak).

In an effort to respond to his colleagues' question, Mr. Hajji Nazar Mohammad Faqeer (Appointee) argued; "Songs and dances are forbidden always in Islam not just in the holy month of Ramadan or Eid." He further asserted, "Our government is not a completely Islamic government, it is 50% Islamic and the remaining 50% is un-Islamic. Islam rejects democracy totally."

Some Senators went on to criticize the MoIC for failing to take appropriate action against immoral serials. "The Ministry is not controlling the media and people are not satisfied with the Ministry," said, Mr. Sefatullah Haqmal (Lugar). Paktia province Senator Abdul Hanan Haqwayoon claimed that Mr. Raheen doesn't want to stop these programs because the RTA is also broadcasting half-naked dancers, immoral drama serials and films. "PRTs established radio stations in the provinces and yet the programs run by those stations are against Islam . . . The only solution for these issues is to enforce Islamic Laws (Sharia Law)," he said.

Mr. Bismilah Afghanmal (Kandahar) said that Senators should not blame the Minister for not controlling the media because they have been given "full freedom". He urged the MoIC to protect "Islamic values and historical monuments of the country".

Acknowledging the Senator's concerns, Minister Sayed Makhdom Rahin, pledged to work towards the fortification of Islamic and cultural values, but suggested that harsh restrictions on television programs would have a negative impact on the youth, "If we stop broadcasting songs, soap operas and films, our young generation will try to get these items from CDs and other channels." According to him eight out of 10 CDs reaching Kabul are vulgar and obscene. He also expressed his concern over various types of cultural attacks, saying, "Besides private television channels, internet websites are also harming morals of our young generation and the Ministry has blocked immoral websites with the cooperation of the Ministry of Telecommunication and Technology."

Committee News

Acting Central Bank Governor Briefs MJ International Relations Committee

The Meshrano Jirga's International Relations Committee invited the acting governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Safi, and his technical team to its 10 September meeting. The Committee raised questions relating to the process for printing Afghan currency, money laundering and its impact on the economy, and the quality and quantity of paper money. The Committee also inquired about the stabilization of the Afghani after 2014 against other regional and international currencies and foreign reserves of Afghanistan.

Mr. Arifullah Pashtoon (Khost), the Committee chairperson, led the questions regarding the current situation of the Afghan currency. "The Senators want to know about the quantity and quality of the money, procurement and future strategies of the Central Bank, that's why we asked the acting governor of the Central Bank to brief the members of the International Relations Committee."

In his briefing, Mr. Safi provided details about all the issues raised. He highlighted that the quality and quantity of the Afghani is under control. "The printing process is based on the market needs and takes into account the inflation targets." He explained that the Central Bank launches the procurement process for printing money, but other ministries are responsible for transparency and accountability, while other agencies are involved in the procurement process.

Mr. Safi also explained about the negative impact of money laundering on the Afghan economy and pointed out the measures they have in place to prevent money laundering. Stabilization of the Afghani after 2014 will depend upon the economy in general and increased Afghan exports. However, he still anticipated that the Afghani can remain stable post-2014 based upon the country's foreign reserves.