

(1) Govt Rejects...

between government and the IEC recently. Based on the existing plan, candidates may file nomination papers on a provincial level.

But, its been a month since residents in Ghazni called for election constituencies to be reduced. The issue has led to the closure of the IEC office in the province. But IEC officials in Kabul are preparing to send a delegation to Ghazni to resolve the issue.

"A delegation from the election commission is expected to travel to Ghazni tomorrow (Monday) and discuss the issue with those protesting the matter and the government officials. We hope that a solution is find to the issue," said Sayed Hafiz Hashimi, IEC commissioner

But, what are the benefits of less constituencies?
"This creates an imposed will, for instance, a voter on this side of the province wants to cast his ballot to a candidate on the other side of the province, with this, we actually impose sanctions on his will and limit his will," said Ghulam Hussain Naseri.

If the plan to reduce electoral constituencies is implemented, all provinces would have been divided into constituencies on the basis of the population they have.

Last week the election observers and political commentators had warned the IEC and the government against decreasing the number of electoral constituencies ahead of the October elections, saying such a move will have negative consequences on the credibility and legitimacy of the upcoming elections in the country. They alleged that some circles within government are making attempts to impose the plan on the IEC to reduce the number of electoral constituencies or dividing the provinces into several electoral constituencies.

Based on the election law, the government should have announced its decision 180 days before the elections on whether to hold the elections with a constituency-based method or the previous method. But election observers and monitoring groups have accused government of making deliberate attempts to impose its plan on the election commission.

IEC Vacancies

While the controversy over the vacant posts in the IEC gathers fresh momentum, the election management body says that it has sent three names to the presidential palace to pick one to be designated as head of the IEC's secretariat.

Meanwhile, election observers and monitoring groups have asked government to pick a qualified nominee to lead the IEC secretariat.

Those picked as candidates for the post include Jawed Habibi, former deputy head of IEC secretariat, Khalid Fahim, head of Swedish committee program for Afghanistan and Abdul Baseer Azimi, former deputy minister of water and energy.

According to the IEC, since the start of the voter registration process, over 2.2 million people have registered across the country.

However election materials have not reached to least 38 districts.

According to the IEC, 330 centers have failed to open in various regions of the country due to security threats. (Tolo news)

(2) AAF, Commandos...

this fighting season, the Taliban have been trying to take control of strategic areas in 14 provinces in the north, north-east and south of the country.

In order to address these security threats, security and defense departments have prepared a plan based on which they have ordered security forces to increase their offensives against the Taliban.

"Our forces will be on the offensive during operations and all our operations have been planned ahead," said Danish. "Currently we are conducting 14 operations in 13 provinces. If threats arise in any place, we will launch operations," defense ministry deputy spokesman Mohammad Radmanish said.

Officials also said the AAF is playing a crucial role in targeting Taliban movements across the country.

A number of former military officers and senators meanwhile said Commandos and Police Special Forces are very good at addressing security threats, but good relations with the Afghan forces was key issue that led them to success.

Analysts said security officials should build solid working relations with all forces.

"In most parts of the country our forces are in a defense status, this is one of the biggest problems. Our forces should change their defensive mode (to an offensive one)," Jawed Kohistani, a former military officer said.

"We will not resolve the situation until we bring changes to our defensive policy," Mohammad Alam Ezediyar, first deputy speaker of the senate said.

According to security departments, this fighting season commandos have conducted 70 operations and Police Special Forces 26 operations in 14 provinces and that they want to double the number to make sure all security threats are addressed. (Tolo news)

(3) US Sanctions 'May...

Ministry of Commerce and Industries meanwhile said Afghanistan will continue trading with regional countries, including Iran, based on national interests. The ministry's spokesman Musafir Qoqandi said Afghanistan will continue its efforts to prevent any problems that affect its trade relations with countries in the region.

"These sanctions might affect Iran's economy, but we, based on our national interests, use different transit routes to prevent any problems. Iran will be part of our efforts for using different routes," Qoqandi said.

Analysts said government is required to form bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with countries in the region to promote Afghanistan's trade.

This comes after US pulled out of Iran's nuclear deal and threatened Tehran with new economic sanctions. (Tolo news)

(4) India Inaugurates...

also produce for other regions of the country," Modi said in Srinagar. The Prime Minister further added that "Keeping that in mind we have been working on various projects here in the past four years."

In reaction to the inauguration of the hydropower plant, the foreign ministry of Pakistan said "Pakistan is seriously concerned about the inauguration [of the Kishan-ganga plant]."

The Pakistani officials are saying that the project violate a World Bank-mediated treaty on the sharing of waters from the Indus and its tributaries upon which 80 per cent of its irrigated agriculture depends. (KP)

(5) Dostum May...

held a telephonic conversation with Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum.

Ghani and Dostum were expected to meet in Ankara but the president had to cut short his visit due increasing violence back at home.

However, the president talked with Dostum on the phone and asked him to return to the country soon.

Qarluq said some government institutions had been directed to take security arrangements for the return of the second vice president.

Dostum's son Batour Dostum and head of the Junbish party, was among the delegation which accompanied the president on his trip to Turkey.

Ghani flew to Turkey last week to attend the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) on Palestine. (Pajhwok)

(6) Women Up...

activist, opined women could choose the right people to make society better. Research shows fewer women than men are involved in corruption. They could prove their honesty as elected public representatives, she said, asking the government to facilitate women's political campaigns. Other women held similar views. Farzana, a resident of Herat City, expressed her concern at challenges being faced by women and called on the government to provide an appropriate environment for women to come forward and contest the elections.

Maria Bashar, a potential candidate for Wolesi Jirga (lower house) polls, expressed concern about a large number of women being barred from contesting the elections.

She told Pajhwok Afghan News although women in the city had a high level of understanding and ability to play an effective part in the upcoming elections, they were being deprived of their rights in districts and remote areas of the province.

In much of the countryside, she said, women did not have ID cards and even did not know about the importance of this process. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) had failed in terms of promoting public awareness, she alleged. Growing instability

Sakina Hussaini, a provincial council (PC) member, voiced her concern over greater insecurity in the districts than the last elections. With the polls drawing closer, she noted, instability had increased across the province.

She recalled: "A few days back, some people from Guzra, the closest district to the provincial capital, told me over the phone that Taliban have asked them to for zakat and ushr. This is but one example of insecurity in districts."

Hussaini urged all women to register as voters and elect people of their choice in the upcoming elections.

She stressed the centrality of women's vote to determining their political future. "I don't ask omen to vote for women. You can vote for men -- those who won't

compromise on the upcoming generation's future."

Unwilling to take part in polls

Fatima, a resident of Shindand, claimed with the passing of each day, insecurity was increasing in the district. Due to their bitter memories of the last polls, people might not take part in the upcoming vote. The previous elections were marred by fraud, and for this reason, she did not want to vote in the October elections. She would be insecure on the one hand and was not convinced of the government and the commission's ability to conduct transparent elections on the other.

Herat police agree security threats exist in Shindand, Zerkoh, Pushtkoh, Koh Zor districts and in parts of Kashak, Rubat Sangi, Kashak Kohna, Gulran, Adraskan and Farsi districts.

Meanwhile, Abdul Ahad Walizada, provincial police spokesman, claimed the security situation in Herat was better than in any other province. Afghan security forces were trying to secure all polling stations in troubled areas, he added.

Lack of awareness

Abdul Qadir Kamil, a political analyst in Herat, proposed the government and the IEC should manage the election processes in a way that all women were enabled to exercise their voting right.

He said that if women were not provided with facility of casting their vote, the elections' legitimacy would be questioned for the public.

Aziza Karimi, Herat women affairs director, stressed the need for women's participation in the elections. She said most of women in districts had little information about elections.

She said public awareness materials were recently shared by the IEC with the women affairs department. Her office would start an awareness programme for women in Herat districts in cooperation with Hajj and Islamic Affairs Department.

On the other hand, Daud Sediqzada, IEC representative for Herat, said the commission had finalised comprehensive programs for public awareness through media and preachers -- both for men and women in Herat.

According to IEC, 101,326 people including 44,108 women registered as voters in Herat between April 14 and May 14. Under the relevant law, Wolesi Jirga elections should have been conducted three years ago.

But the process was delayed for many reasons and the lower house members continued serving three years after the expiry of their term in compliance with a presidential order. The Wolesi Jirga and district council elections are scheduled for October 20.

Herat is one of large and important provinces of Afghanistan, having 19 districts. Five newly created districts are Shindand, Poshtkoh, Koh Zor-O-Zawal. (Pajhwok)

(7) Families Barring...

But Gulab Mangal, Musakhel district's administrative chief, said there was no school for girls in the town and the decision would pave the way for educational facilities.

About 2,000 girls are currently studying together with boys in primary schools and the number would hopefully double to 4,000, he said.

The agreement would help girls continue higher education, believed the district chief, who hailed the tribal elders' decision as a positive step.

Naseer Ahmad, Khost education director, said the decision would improve the education sector in the province. But such improvement would not be easy without donor support, he remarked.

As many as 300,000 students, including 120,000 girls, are studying at 396 schools across the province. (Pajhwok)

(8) Government...

Ashraf Ghani's offer of peace talks. "We will stay with you until we bring this war to a peaceful conclusion," he said.

He met local officials in the governor's compound and heard a bitter litany of complaints about the failure of the government to protect the city and the province, where the Taliban control many areas.

"If you want to make Farah better, then please, you should help before there's an incident," said Belqis Roshan, a former senator. "We have 10 districts, and apart from the centres, they're under Taliban rule," she said.

Reinforcements rushed in from other provinces and repeated strikes by Afghan and U.S. air forces pushed the insurgents back from the city centre but bazaars remain deserted and the streets empty.

"People are still worried about the situation," said Farah resident Abdullah. "The Taliban have a strong presence in almost all districts and are still hiding in some parts of the city."

As the Taliban have continued the spring offensive they launched last month, heavy fighting has been seen from Badkshshan and Baghlan provinces in the

north to Farah in the west and Ghazni and Zabul in the centre.

In Ajrestan district in Ghazni, Mohammad Arif Noori, a spokesman for the provincial governor said fresh commando forces had arrived and the Taliban pushed back from the town centre.

"Fighting is continuing but the attacks on the district centre have been repelled," he said.

However local officials said the centre remained under severe threat and the local governor had fled.

"Since last night, we have lost contact with officials and security forces in Ajrestan. Since then we have had no report on the situation in the district," said Mansoor Faqiri, a member of the Ghazni provincial council. (Reuters)

(9) More Than...

to three percent of the country's population," said Mehre Khoda Saber the head of Internally Displaced Directorate in the MoRR.

Meanwhile, internally displaced families describe their living situation as catastrophic.

"We are living a difficult live with a tent in the desert," an IDP told Ariana News in western Herat province.

Afghanistan is among the countries with the highest number of displaced citizens with more than one million IDP's and five million refugees living abroad. (ATN)

(10) Clashes Ongoing...

On Saturday, the district governor warned that if reinforcements were not sent to the district, it would collapse to the Taliban. He said at the time all government employees in the district were under siege and that the Taliban were advancing.

The clashes started three days ago when dozens of armed Taliban attacked the district.

"At least four government forces have been killed in the clash with the Taliban and ten others wounded," officials said on Saturday.

Hamdullah warned that it would be tragic if the district collapsed.

This comes after 20 security force members were killed in heavy clashes with the Taliban in two districts of central Ghazni province four days ago.

However, no further details have been released about updated casualties. (Tolo news)

(11) Senators Urge...

The agreement with America should be canceled," said Senator Zalmay Zabuli.

"The foreigners shouldn't be just watchful of the situation in Afghanistan. If they can't help, they should leave Afghanistan. What is the advantage of having their presence in the country," said Senator Mohammad Hanif Hanafi.

The chairman of the Senate House (Meshrano Jirga), meanwhile, said that the security officials should make clear the implementation of the security agreement with the U.S. and that thereafter, a decision should be taken over the issue. "The security officials should be asked to give clarification on the agreement with the U.S. and NATO. Which parts have been not addressed [yet], if there are challenges it should be revealed so based on that we could make a decision," said Fazl Hadi Muslimyar.

The members of Meshrano Jirga stressed that if the international community does not prevent the influence of neighboring countries and implement the commitment being made towards Afghanistan, it will be difficult to maintain stability in the country. (ATN)

(12) 13 Voter...

Mohammad Yousun 60, a resident of Khulm district.

"I will cast my vote for an appropriate candidate for the sake of peace and the people," another resident said.

IEC has established nine centers in Khulm district.

"Many people are registering, we are supposed to work until 1:00 pm, but people are coming, and we are working until 4:00 pm," said Ahmad Munir Hamdard, an IEC registration officer in Khulm. (Tolo news)

(13) Talk to Taliban...

U.S. Resistance

The tensions over Afghanistan come as Russia's ties with Trump's administration steadily worsen with the ratcheting up of American sanctions over alleged Kremlin interference in the 2016 presidential elections. The two powers are also increasingly at odds in Syria as Russia seeks to restore its influence in the Middle East.

Taliban representatives told Kabulov they won't meet with what they consider a "puppet" administration without first holding negotiations with the Americans, whom they consider as "occupiers," he said.

Zamir Kabulov Photographer: Sefa Karacan/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images
A top State Department official in March said talks with the Taliban should not in-

clude the U.S. "We certainly cannot substitute for the Afghan government and the Afghan people," said Alice Wells, the principal deputy assistant secretary for South and Central Asian affairs.

General John Nicholson, who commands 14,000 U.S. troops and 6,500 North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Afghanistan, the same month urged the Taliban to take up President Ghani's offer or face an escalating military campaign.

"You're seeing a real growing capability. So in the Taliban's mind, they see what's coming," Nicholson said. "And these capabilities are only going to get greater. And so this really is probably their best time to attempt a negotiation because it's only going to get worse for them."

The situation on the ground is heading in the opposite direction, according to Russia, where memories remain fresh of the Soviet Union's Afghanistan experience almost three decades after the Red Army's humiliating withdrawal in 1989. Soviet Experience

"We went through this when Soviet troops were there, it was a very similar picture," said Kabulov, who forecasts increasing Taliban control of the war-torn country. "Another 5,000 or even 50,000 troops won't help. It's not going to get any better."

The Soviet Union lost 15,000 soldiers during a disastrous 10-year occupation of Afghanistan.

The foreign forces are in Afghanistan as part of security accords signed under Ghani after he took office in 2014. They allow for U.S. and NATO troops to stay through the end of 2024 and beyond.

Russia says the Islamic State represents a growing threat in Afghanistan and while some Taliban elements are in a tactical alliance with the jihadists, the bulk of the movement and its leadership is determined to fight the terrorist group. This means the Taliban has common interests with Russia, it says.

The U.S. charges that Russia is exaggerating the strength of Islamic State in Afghanistan to legitimize the actions of the Taliban and counter the American influence there.

Russia rejected a Taliban request to provide it with money to buy weapons, said Kabulov, adding that the only Russian goal in Afghanistan is to "promote a peace settlement" and stop Islamic State from setting up a Caliphate. (Monitoring Desk)

(14) Private Investment...

Industrial Park and the master plan is also complete. He hoped practical work on the Industrial Park would be launched this year. (Pajhwok)

(15) Ex-Pakistani...

Shahid Aziz's son denied the report that his father had been killed. Aziz reportedly worked in Afghanistan as penance for what he had done in support of US troops.

Former military ruler Pervez Musharraf said Aziz, sporting a beard, had gone to Syria, and was killed there.

On completing 37 years of service, Aziz retired from the Pakistan Army in 2005. He had also served as Lahore corps commander. (Pajhwok)

(16) Rashid Highlights...

"Playing Test cricket is the dream of every country and player. It is a huge honor and achieving this in a short time is a proud achievement for all of us. It will be a big moment for cricket in Afghanistan to play a Test against India. I can't wait to be called a Test cricketer. I think there will be no one who will not watch the match back home. People in Afghanistan are crazy about cricket."

A lot of Afghanistan's success has depended on their vital strength - spin bowling and Rashid feels that his team will look to cash in on the advantage.

"Every team has its strengths. Everyone knows Afghanistan has the best spin bowling attack because of which we have won a lot of matches. We have been working hard on fast bowling and batting departments as well," he said.

As the team gears up to take on an Indian team sans Virat Kohli, Rashid feels India's records and reputation will not intimidate his team.

While the Afghan spinners are world class, their batsmen have a lot of catching up to do.

Their highest ranked ICC batsman is Rahmat Shah at 32 and is among the four Afghans in the top-100. Rashid believes their success in the Test match depends a lot on their batting.

"Batting will be the key for us. If we bat well, we can trouble any good side with the ball," he said.

Rashid is hoping the historic Test match will open up opportunities against other major teams.

"We are hoping to get more games against the big teams. And have a long series, not like one or two ODIs. It's a tough challenge for us. We can say real cricket has started now (for Afghanistan)," said as quoted by Times of India. (Tolo news)