ERC Recommends Short-Term Electoral Reforms to Expedite Process

KABUL - The Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) on Monday recommended that the National Unity Government consider implementing a number of near-term electoral reforms in the next month, a move that would expedite the process that has, until recently, been marred by gridlock and delays.

According to ERC members, the short-term reforms should be pushed through a legislative order by President Ashraf Ghani, given that Parliament is currently on its summer recess. Even if the legislature was in session, however, the ERC says lawmakers would not have the authority to vote on the reforms because their constitutionally mandated terms have already expired.

"If we are not able to go through with the recommendations in the period mentioned, in that case, we will need six months, and the Independent Election Commission will also need the same time period, which will delay the parliamentary elections for another two years," ERC member Sabaana Sah- ghi was quoted on Monday. "Considering such a situation, the ERC made a request to the Independent Election Commission to expedite the process."

AGO Still Grappling with Two Major Corruption Cases

KABUL - The Attorney General's Office (AGO) has yet to conclude investigations into the remaining debt incurred by Kabul Bank borrowers and the alleged embezzlement of millions of dollars by Ministry of Urban Development & Housing officials.

The Kabul Bank still has 35 defaulters for whom the government has issued travel bans, but remains at large, without having paid back what they owe. However, (More on P5).

Governors Urg to Increase Strength of Border Police

JALALABAD - The governors of eastern Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar provinces have said they have improved coordination among local departments to eliminate threatsposed from the border areas. Lack of security personnel for border protection, insecurity on highways, occasionally power lines cut and need for reforms at the local governance were major issues in the eastern provinces.

A coordinated meeting attended by the governors of the eastern zone and 20th Nish Military Corps commanders and other security officials was held in Jalalabad city, the capital of Nangarhar, today to discuss current situations in the eastern zone. The meeting is expected (More on P6).

Saudi Arabia Hosts Clandestine Taliban-Govt Talks

KABUL - Following crucial face-to-face talks in Moscow, a tremulous visit to Islamabad, a clandestine meeting was held between a two-member Taliban delegation and Afghan government officials in Saudi Arabia, a well-placed source said on Monday.

Representatives of Taliban's Qatar office were also in attendance, a senior Afghan official familiar with the development told Pajhwok Afghan News. The Taliban-Arabian contact took place some weeks after the peace talks in Pakistan.

The ground-breaking in Moscow were also attended by observers from China and United States. The parties agreed to meet again in Ramadan, probably within a week, either in Pakistan or China. Witnessing the talks, the official and Saudi authorities had invited the two-member delegation after the Moscow talks to the oil-rich kingdom, where detailed discussions regarding the peace process were held. (More on P6).

Details Surrounding Peace Talks Still Sketchy

KABUL - The Afghanistan High Peace Council on Monday said that details surrounding the second round of peace talks, scheduled for Saturday, between the government and the Taliban, are still not clear but that Pakistan wants to host the initiative.

The HPC said that it is possible that the second round of talks will be held in Pakistan, adding that the issue of a ceasefire was an essential part of the talks. The council said that Pakistan was adamant it wants the talks to be held in their country. (More on P7).

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