



## Afghanistan in April 2014

### Elections – vote of confidence

Despite the life threats, sporadic attacks by the Taliban, rainy weather and high fraud concerns, Afghan men and women flocked to the polls in high numbers on the April 5<sup>th</sup> Presidential and Provincial Council Elections. The estimated 60% turnout, 36% of whom were women, is a clear improvement from the estimated 40% in the 2009 Presidential Elections. National and international observers reported that the levels of fraud were considerably lower than the previous elections as well.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) announced the preliminary results. Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani have made it to the highly anticipated run-off expected on 7<sup>th</sup> June, by securing 44.9% and 31.5% of valid votes respectively. Zalmay Rassoul, who was considered a favorite of President Karzai, stood third and was the only other candidate to get to double digits (11.5%). The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) will adjudicate more than 100 complaints related to preliminary results, 99 of which were lodged by Abdullah. ECC is expected to issue the final result on May 14<sup>th</sup>.

### Peace talks

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, some former Taliban commanders in Kabul announced the establishment of a new political movement, 'The Path to Saving Afghanistan'. Sayed Akbar Aqa, the movement's leader, had been sentenced to 16 years in prison for abducting 3 UN officials in 2004 but pardoned by President Karzai in 2010. The movement's aim is to establish an independent Islamic government, but it also wants to establish ties based on mutual respect and trust with 'foreigners' and neighbours.

Motasim Agha Jan, another former Taliban leader who tried to broker talks between Taliban and the Afghan government and went missing in UAE this month, announced that he had deliberately shut himself away. He said the 'enemies of peace and security in Afghanistan' planned to assassinate him in the UAE, but he would continue his efforts. Other Taliban spokespersons in the past have said he is not the true representative of the group.

### Security – flower power

Security officials announced that on voting day, 65 suicide attacks were stopped. In the evening, many Afghans, mostly urban youth, expressed their gratitude to the security forces by giving them flowers and chanting 'long live our security forces'.

Provincial authorities in Laghman announced that the armed local people have ousted the Taliban from 20 villages. This was in response to Taliban attempts to stop them from attending schools and using health clinics.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, security officials announced that their hitherto deadliest air strike in Eastern Afghanistan killed 17 Taliban fighters including the Taliban's Kunar governor. Kunar saw a high level of attacks by the Taliban during the voting day. Provincial officials in this border province also reported that more than 100 rockets were launched from the Pakistani side of the border in the last week of April, killing mostly animals. Pakistani security officials in the past have acknowledged that some of their rockets may have gone awry in their fight against the Pakistani Taliban.

Clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces resumed in Wardaj, Badakhshan after many months of relative stability. The Taliban claimed to have overpowered at least three police checkpoints. This Northern province was a battleground for many weeks last year before Afghan security forces retook Wardaj.

### Cost of conflict – Watch out for rogue police

A day before the elections, an Afghan policeman shot dead Associate Press journalist Anja Niedringhaus and wounded her colleague in Khost. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, another Afghan policeman shot dead three American doctors. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, another policeman in Kabul was arrested after he shot and injured Mariam Koofi, a member of parliament from Takhar. The shooting was caused by an argument.

## **Rights**

Abdul and Sultana Qahar, the vengeful parents of a 14-year old girl in Baghlan, cut off a Mullah's ears and nose after discovering he had been sexually abusing their daughter. Under police arrest Abdul said he does not regret his actions and the police would not have delivered justice if he had gone to them in the first place. Aneesa, a 12-year old in Sari Pul, was gang raped by 5 armed men. Her father, half-paralysed by the shock, is now in Kabul with her demanding justice.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, an Afghan fact-finding commission accused the US and British military of operating six detention centres against the Afghan law. This could further strain relations between the Karzai administration and the West. In an opposite but apparently unrelated move, Karzai issued pardons and commutations to thousands of prisoner including those convicted for terrorist and criminal activities. This was partly in response to 1,700 prisoners in Herat who had gone on to a 9-day hunger strike. They criticised the government for keeping them in the jail while setting free the 'terrorists' from Bagram prison.

The decree came on the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Mujahidin's victory over Russian-backed government, a day that many Afghans view as another dark day in their recent history. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, tens of rights activists, mostly women, gathered in front of Darul Aman Palace, Kabul to condemn the human rights violations during the leftist regimes and by the Mujahidin, and the current terrorist attacks by the Taliban. They demanded, among others, that the Afghan government repeals the Amnesty Law that provides immunity to perpetrators of crimes against humanity, and publish the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission's conflict mapping report. The report documents these crimes and awaits endorsement by President Karzai.

On the eve of International Labour Day, at least 16 local coal miners in Samangan were killed and several others trapped following a gas explosion. Officials say it was an illegal project and the police are seeking the elusive owner of the mine.

## **Humanitarian**

At least 150 were killed and thousands of people were left stranded and displaced as a result of devastating flash floods in Jowzjan, Badghis and Faryab on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, a landslide caused by rains took 4 lives and destroyed hundreds of houses in Takhar.

## **Economy**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Afghan officials announced their new five-year economic policy. Extractions of minerals, energy generation and other infrastructure projects are included as national priorities. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Economy said the policy cannot be implemented without long term international support.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> USAID announced that the Afghan police arrested Abdul Khalil Qadery for allegedly embezzling half a million dollars. The accused worked for a USAID contractor and was under the watch of the USAID Office of Inspector General.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, an independent watchdog, announced that International Security Assistance Forces, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations and the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency are the worst performing institutions in the fight against corruption.

## **Culture and people**

A youth group in Kabul launched a campaign to support the flood victims in Northern provinces. They raised \$5,000 from mostly employees of aid agencies in the first week. The money has been spent to provide food and safe drinking water for 800 affected households.

Fahim Hashimy, the owner of 1TV, Afghanistan's second biggest media outlet, was elected as the head of the country's Olympic Committee. He replaces a military general. Afghanistan has had success in both sports and media freedom lately.

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, President Karzai awarded 27 Mir Masjidi Khan Medals to cultural and intellectual figures including to Abul Ahad Momand, the first Afghan to journey to outer space. This was the first event of its kind and scale in Afghanistan.

Shohra Qaderi, a female student from Balkh, topped the public university entrance examination sat by 225,000 students. She was part of the first batch of students who completed all their 12 years of schooling after the Taliban rule. Her father, who lost his eyesight in a bomb blast during the civil war was one of her main supporters. Top scorers in the past have received scholarships to study at university abroad.