



Afghanistan in June 2015

Politics

Public approval of the Afghan governments' work continued to drop in June. The political scene was dominated by concerns over the slow pace of electoral reform and the Parliamentary term coming to an end on the 22nd. After a series of consultations, on the 19th, President Ghani extended Parliament's term allowing space for reform until the next parliamentary elections are held. Such an extension is not grounded in the Constitution but had to be done out of political necessity. Details as to the electoral schedule might be announced next month.

Ghani and Abdullah's deliberations over electoral reform have caused the delay in parliamentary elections. They have yet to agree on who should chair the Electoral Reform Commission. Other obstacles include delays in the distribution of electronic IDs which would make the voting process more transparent. International donors have suspended all funding until critical and fast reforms take place.

Peace talks remained perplexing throughout the month. Initial hope was instigated by informal meetings between Afghan MPs and Taliban representatives in Dubai on the 7th and in Oslo on the 15th as delegations from the Afghan government and Taliban participated in the Mediators' Forum. Also, for the first time, an all-female Afghan delegation discussed peace and rights with the Taliban in Oslo on the 1st. However, optimism faded towards the end of the month with increased Taliban attacks. Also, Mohammad Mohaqeq, the Second Deputy CEO of Afghanistan who headed the Afghan delegation in Oslo, reported that they have seen no change in Taliban positions.

Security

The start of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month in which warfare is prohibited, began on the 18th. Unfortunately this did not stop the bloodshed in Afghanistan. Insurgents attacked strategic grounds in northern Afghanistan. The control of at least five districts in Badakhshan, Kunduz, Nuristan and southern provinces teetered between Government forces and the Taliban. After the Taliban captured Chardara district in Kunduz for about a week, Afghan forces reclaimed it on 25th. However, the insurgents, helped by Central Asian and Pakistani militants held their control in a nearby Dasht-e Archi district.

The heart of the government was attacked too. On the 22nd, seven Taliban fighters attacked the Afghan Parliament. Moments before, MPs were preparing to vote on President Ghani's third nominee for the Minister of Defence. In a heroic feat, Eisa Khan, an Afghan soldier claimed he singlehandedly killed six attackers. Ashraf Ghani awarded him with an apartment while the NATO Secretary General praised the increasing professionalism of Afghan forces.

On the 27th, NATO defence ministers reaffirmed their support to Afghanistan's security sector. Douglas E. Lute, the United States Permanent Representative to NATO said Washington is closely monitoring the security situation in Afghanistan during this fighting season. Decisions about the number of American soldiers and US timeline in Afghanistan might be adjusted as a result.

On the 8th, provincial officials said a drone attack killed Mullah Asmatullah, a Taliban commander who led 100 fighters in Kunar.

Competition for resources grew between Taliban and Islamic State (IS) affiliate fighters in June. On the 16th, the Taliban urged IS fighters to stop recruiting in Afghanistan and continued their struggle under the Taliban flag. This came amid reports of fighting between the two insurgent groups. In a rebuff, IS fighters compared the Taliban to the American-sponsored Iraqi militia and threatened their annihilation. Worried about the spread of IS in Central Asia, Vladimir Putin said IS operate in 25 of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. However, a senior US commander said IS is not as serious of a threat in Afghanistan as it is in Libya or Iraq.

Rights

Notable progress was made in women's participation in governance. On the 14th, President Ghani nominated Anisa Rassouli, the head of the Afghan Women Judges' Association, as the new member of the Supreme Court. If confirmed by Parliament, she will be Afghanistan's first woman to reach such a level in the judiciary. An Afghan religious group decried the nomination as un-Islamic. Afghanistan has 245 female judges, which Ghani said is a source of great pride compared to Iran who has none.

In June, Ghani also appointed two female governors in Daikundi and Ghor provinces. While rights activists hailed this historic decision, residents in Daikundi have held protests against it. One resident said a female governor cannot tackle the growing insecurity challenges of the province.

Launching Afghanistan's National Action Plan for Women Peace and Security on the 30th, Ghani said misogyny is still dominant among Afghan youth and the government is committed to resolving the issue. He also said he will ensure the inclusion of female deputy ministers in key ministries.

Concerns about children actively participating in war grew in June. On the 7th, the national spy agency said they rescued two children Fazal Amin, 9, and Mohammad Amin, 12, from the Taliban in Helmand. These Kandahari kids were sent to a madrasa for religious education but were instead chained inside their classes, and trained to carry out suicide attacks. On the 18th, local media reported that groups of Afghan children, mostly under the age of 15, were engaged in the warfare in the southern provinces. They were motivated by their hatred towards the Taliban who had killed their family members.

Rights activists protested against a parliamentary debate about removing the single seat allocated to Hindus and Sikhs. On the 14th, the Indian Government granted citizenship to at least 4,300 Afghan and Pakistani Hindus and Sikhs.

Development and Humanitarian

On the 6th, the Belgian-based International Taste & Quality Institute named Afghanistan's saffron the best in the world. This three-star award goes to Afghanistan for third time in a row. Last year, Afghan farmers harvested around 4,000 kg of saffron.

On the 18th, The UAE-based Pride Group signed a contract to establish Afghanistan's first online marketplace. The \$20 million Afghanistan International Commodity Exchange Market will help Afghan traders to sell goods such as agriculture produce, handicrafts, precious stone and carpets.

Teachers of several state-run schools in Kabul went on strike for over 2 weeks, demanding higher pay and improved conditions. Teachers are poorly and irregularly paid (between \$83 – \$133 monthly). Their expectations were raised last year when Ghani announced the government will give a plot of land to every teacher within six months.

The U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction alleged that Ministry of Education officials have repeatedly provided fraudulent data to donors to personally gain from donations for schools. Other reports confirm this claim. 70% of Ghor schools, for example, are closed but remain open on paper. Local powerbrokers and insurgents are also said to pocket the funds of these 'ghost schools'.

June also saw some progress on anti-corruption measures. On the 8th, three of the Ministry of Urban Development officials suspected of large scale graft were caught near Afghan-Tajik border in Badakhshan. They were trying to run away. The Attorney General Office also received the list of Kabul Bank's debt defaulters. If they do not settle repayment in a week legal actions, including selling their properties, will be taken. Some \$268 million has so far been recovered.

Culture and people

Afghanistan's football team won their first match in a World Cup qualifier tournament. They defeated Cambodia 1-0. Afghanistan has very little chance to qualify for the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018.

Religious figures in the Capital and Western provinces declared support for the Afghan security forces. Around 2,000, mostly mosque Imams, also condemned extremism.