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Preface

The Salma Dam constructed by India in Herat province was recently inaugurated. Moreover, the contracts to build two other dams were also signed with foreign companies in the past few days. The Salma Dam has the capacity to produce 42 MW of electricity and can irrigate around 75 thousand hectares of lands and also the Kajaki and Bakhshabad Dams have the capacity of producing 151 and 27 MW of electricity.

Afghanistan has the capacity to construct dams in its various regions but what are the obstacles in the way of implementing these infrastructural projects? And in this regard how promising are recent progresses? In this regard you would read in the first part of Weekly Analysis.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the rejection of Presidential legislative decrees on electoral reforms by Wolesi Jirga. Last week, Wolesi Jirga rejected the President's legislative decree on election reforms for the second time. Based on the National Unity Government's agreement, the Afghan electoral system was supposed to be reformed before the upcoming parliamentary elections but this case has now become an enigma and therefore, the fate of the upcoming parliamentary election seems vague.

The questions are why has the electoral reform has raised controversies between the government and Wolesi Jirga? In this regard what is people's opinion? What is the direction of the reforms in electoral system? And is the fate of upcoming parliamentary elections?

In this issue of the weekly analysis you would read the analysis of the center for strategic and regional studies on the above two issues.

Infrastructural projects: dams and recent progresses



In the past two weeks we have unprecedentedly witnessed the construction of infrastructures (dams) in the country. After 40 years of ups and downs while building Salma Dam in Herat, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at last inaugurated the dam in a special ceremony on June 4, 2016 in Herat.

Following the inauguration of Salma Dam, the contract to expand Kajaki Dam in Helmand was also signed with a Turk-American company. Based on the deal, the company will prepare the proposal to expand the dam within the three months and will complete the dam within three years. Last week the Afghan government also inked an agreement with an Italian company to construct Bakhshabad Dam in Farah.

The necessity and capacity of building dams in Afghanistan, and the impacts of these dams on Afghan economy are the issues analyzed here.

The need to build dams

The followings are the reasons why construction of dams is necessary in Afghanistan:

First; agriculture: there are 9610000 hectares of arable land in Afghanistan which covers 14.73% of total lands in the country. From this amount, only 5.324 million hectares are under cultivation but due to lack of water, 4.28 million hectares of arable land in the country are not under cultivation. But with the construction of dams, these lands will also come under irrigation.

Second; electricity: Afghanistan generates only 19% of its needed electricity inside the country and imports the remaining 81% from neighboring countries. Thus the country spends millions of dollars on importing electricity. According to Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS, Afghanistan Electricity Company), from 2007 to 2015, Afghanistan has spent 973 million dollars to import electricity, while the country has vast opportunities and capacities to produce electricity and only its hydropower capacity is 23 thousand MWs of electricity. Hydroelectric dams have a dual function which means besides producing electricity it preserves water.

Third; the prevention of natural disasters: flood in various regions in Afghanistan annually kills many people, causes financial losses and destroys agricultural lands in the country. Construction of dams will in a great extent prevent these disasters.

Fourth; the future situation and water crisis: the population in Afghanistan is expected to be doubled in the coming 30 years which means the country would need more water, irrigation of lands and electricity in the coming years. But unfortunately, most of Afghanistan's waters flows into the neighborhood countries and no practical step have been taken to control these waters inside the country. These waters will be the subject of future politics and also the major reason of future wars.

The capacity to build dams in Afghanistan

There are five river basins in the country, which in a large extent have the capacity of building dams on them.

Overall, several dams are considered to be built on these five river basins. Practical work on some of them is commenced, for instance, the expansion of Salma and Kajaki Dams, on some others studies have been conducted (such as, Baghdara, Srobi-B, Kunar-A, Kajaki-B, Kukcha, Gulbahar, Kama, Kunar-B and Kilagai) and some others are in pre-study stages (for instance, Alambagh, Lar Amu, Dasht-e-Jam).

14 dams are mentioned in the chart below, which will have the capacity to produce 7397.5 MW of electricity and building them will cost 17720 million dollars.

Although, there is no exact research about the hydroelectric production capacity of Afghanistan, but energy experts share a common view that Afghanistan has the capacity of generating 23 thousand MW of hydropower. (For further information see Chart-1)

Chart-1: the opportunities of building Dams

Number	Project	River	Province	Capacity (MW)	Commencement date	Estimated costs (million dollars)
1	Salma	Hariroad	Herat	40	2020	200
2	Expansion of Kajaki	Helmand	Helmand	18.5	2019	90
3	Baghdara	Panjshir	Kapisa/Parwan	210	2021	600
4	Srobi-2	Kabul	Laghman	180	2021	700
5	Kunar-A	Kunar	Kunar	789	2022	2000
6	Kajaki	Helmand	Helmand	100	2021	300
7	Kukcha	Kukcha	Badakhshan	445	2022	1400
8	Gulbahar	Panjshir	Panjshir/Baghlan	120	2021	500

9	Kama	Kunar	Nangarhar	45	2021	180
10	Kunar-B	Kunar		300	2021	600
11	Kilagai		Baghlan	60	2021	250
12	Alam Bagh	Helmand	Uruzgan	90	2021	400
13	Lar Amu	Amu		1000	2023	2500
14	Dasht-e- Jem	Pianch		4000	2023	8000

Source: annual report of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS): 1394

Salma, Kajaki and Bakhshabad Dams

However, the Salma Dam had begun in 1970s, but the construction of the dam was affected by the three decades of war in Afghanistan and after 2001, due to the Afghan government's demand, India began the construction of the dam and recently completed it. India spent approximately 290 million dollars to build the Salma dam which has the capacity to generate 42 MW of electricity per hour. The Salma Dam will enlighten almost 2.5 hundred thousand homes and will irrigate 75 thousand hectares of lands in 640 villages in Chisht-e-Sharif, Uobi, Pashtun Zarghun, Karukh, Guzara, Engil, Zindjan, Kushan and Ghurian districts.

On the other hand, based on the new agreement, the Salma dam which now has the capacity of producing approximately 51 MWs of electricity will produce 151 MW of electricity after installing four other turbines. The dam can also preserve 1.1 billion cubic meters of water which will irrigate vast agricultural lands.

Besides that, the contract of building Bakhshabad Dam in Farah was also signed between the Afghan government and an Italian company. The dam will have the capacity of producing 27 MW of electricity and preservation of 1.3 billion cubic meters of water which will irrigate 104 thousand hectares of lands in Farah.

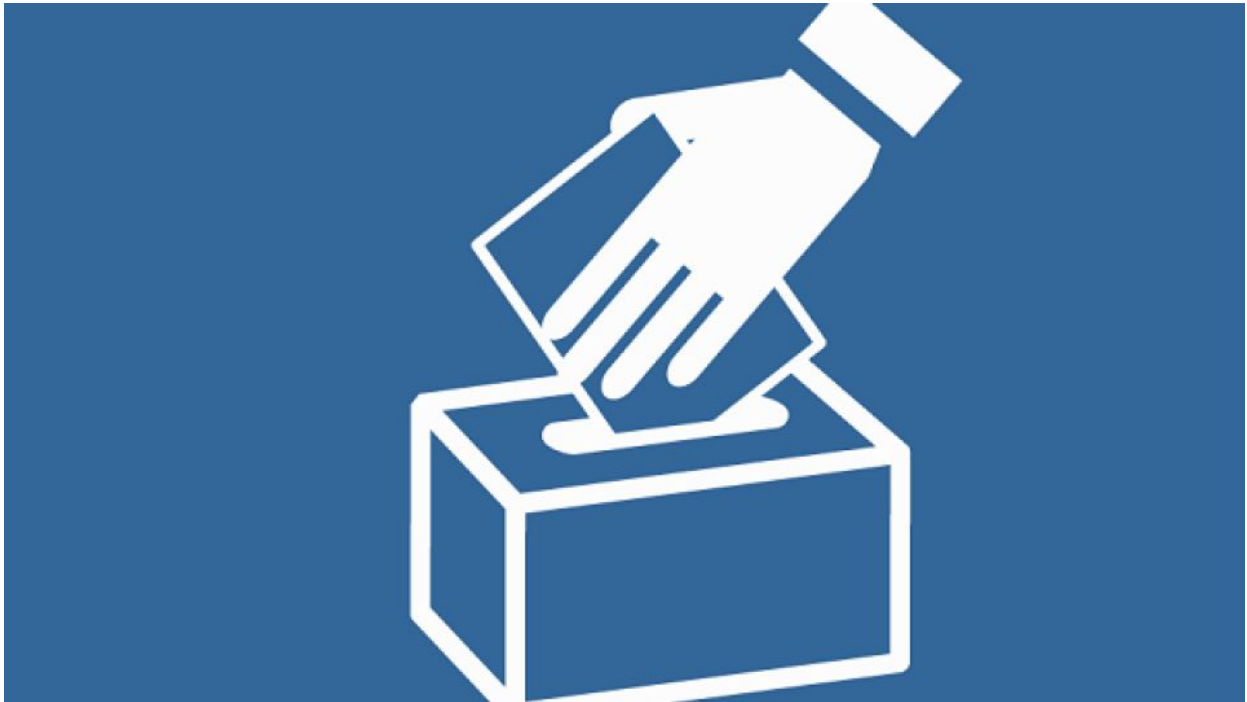
Obstacles in the way of constructing dams

Although there are many obstacles in the way of building dams in Afghanistan but the followings are the two main hindrances:

Financial resources and attracting investments: Afghanistan has vast capacity of producing hydropower, but construction of dams to produce hydropower requires large sums of money, which the Afghan government and governmental budget cannot afford. For instance according to the chart above, 17.7 billion dollars is needed to build all those fourteen dams. On the other hand, foreign donors are not interested to build major dams as well; because on the one hand, it costs a large amount of money and on the other hand, it requires long time. In addition, the Afghan government has not been able to convince foreign investors to invest in dams in the country. Insecurity, lack of water agreements and opposition of neighboring countries are the reasons why foreign investors are not interested in investing in dams in Afghanistan.

Security: insecurity is also the main reason why foreign investors are not willing to invest in energy sector in Afghanistan. the Afghans have experienced in the past 15 years that controlling water would not only require hard working but also spoiling the bloods of many Afghans and the existing dams are also build with the cost of many Afghan lives.

The NUG and electoral reforms



Since the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), the electoral reform has become an enigma in the country. The Afghan President and Chief Executive Officer had made serious commitment in the NUG agreement to reform electoral system. But due to the complicated process of electoral reform, it seems that it has become a political issue.

Wolesi Jirga has successively rejected the Afghan President's legislative decrees on electoral reforms. Recent legislative decree of the President was also rejected by the absolute majority of Wolesi Jirga members. The Presidential Palace termed it a step back in bringing reforms in the electoral system.

The question is, why has electoral reforms have been challenging? What are the demands of the government and Wolesi Jirga? And finally what will be the fate of the upcoming election?

The need for electoral reforms

After the controversial parliamentary election in 1389, although the controversies raised from fraud in the election were calmed down, but due to the problems in the electoral system, the new electoral law was approved by the parliament in 1392 and was signed by the Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The 1393 Afghan Presidential Election was also held with vast fraud and conflict over the outcomes of the elections lasted for several months. Later with the mediation of the US Secretary of States John Kerry the two rivals signed the NUG agreement, one of the most important provisions of which was about electoral reforms.

After the formation of the NUG, no serious efforts were made to reform electoral system and after many delays Special Electoral Reform Commission (SERC) was formed. The commission offered some recommendation in order to reform electoral system and based on these recommendations, the Afghan President issued two decrees which were rejected by Wolesi Jirga one after another.

The main driver behind the government's efforts for electoral reforms in its first year was preparation to hold the Wolesi Jirga and district council elections so that it could amend the constitution and legalize the post of Executive Office. But at the height of the arguments about the expiration of the two year period of the NUG, the US Secretary of States John Kerry visited Kabul and with an interpretation of the NUG agreement said that the NUG's term is for five year and thus the question of the government's legitimacy was resolved.

Legislative decrees of the President

Two legislative decrees of the President (the decree-84 and 85)¹ which was about amending the electoral law and the law on the structures of the election commissions had brought the following main changes in the electoral system based on the recommendations of SERC:

- Establishment of lists of voters based on voter's ID documents;

¹ The amended text of electoral law: http://moi.gov.af/content/files/OfficialGazette/01101/OG_01184.pdf

- Changes in the composition of the Selection Committee;
- Changes in the composition and tenure of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) by decreasing the number of commissioners and staggering their terms of service;
- Change in the requirements for the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission's commissioners;
- Change in the composition of the Wolesi Jirga (appropriation of an extra seat for Sikhs and Hindus);
- Change in the composition of the provincial and district councils (fixing 25% of seats for women);
- Employing school teachers and other civil servants as temporary electoral staff.

On December 21, 2015, the Afghan Parliament rejected the first decree of the Afghan President which was about amending the law on the structure of electoral bodies and on December 26, it rejected his another decree which recommended the amendment of electoral law.

On March 5, 2016, the Afghan government announced that the President has issued two other legislative decrees (decree-158 and 159)². These two decrees were almost the same as the previous decrees and it had only brought some changes in the selection process of the members of the election commissions.

On April 23, 2016, the Presidential Palace sent the decree amending the law on the structure of the electoral bodies to the Parliament. Besides other changes, the decree had also proposed some changes in the composition of the Selection Committee; but Wolesi Jirga rejected the decree. The Presidential Palace did not send the decree recommending the amendment of the electoral law to the parliament.

Recent decree of the President about amending the law on the structure of electoral bodies was very controversial and recommended some changes in the composition of the Selection Committee. Inclusion of the heads of Wolesi Jirga,

² The text of the electoral law after the second amendment:
http://moj.gov.af/content/files/OfficialGazette/01201/OG_01207.pdf

Mishranu Jirga and the Supreme Court in the Selection Committee; establishment of the voter lists according to voters' ID documents; change in the composition of the Wolesi Jirga, provincial council and district council; and employing schools teachers and other civil servants as temporary electoral staff were the changes that some of them were also recommended in the previous decree sent to the parliament. This decree was also rejected with an absolute majority by Wolesi Jirga on June 13, 2016.

Non-inclusion of the Parliament in the composition of the Selection Committee is considered the reason behind the rejection of the President's first decree; therefore, in the next decree of the President the head of the two houses of the Parliament were included in the composition of the Selection Committee. But this decree was also rejected and this time the delay in sending the decree to Wolesi Jirga was said to be the reason behind its rejection. (The decree was supposed to be sent to the parliament one month after the beginning of the New Year but the government sent it after two months.)

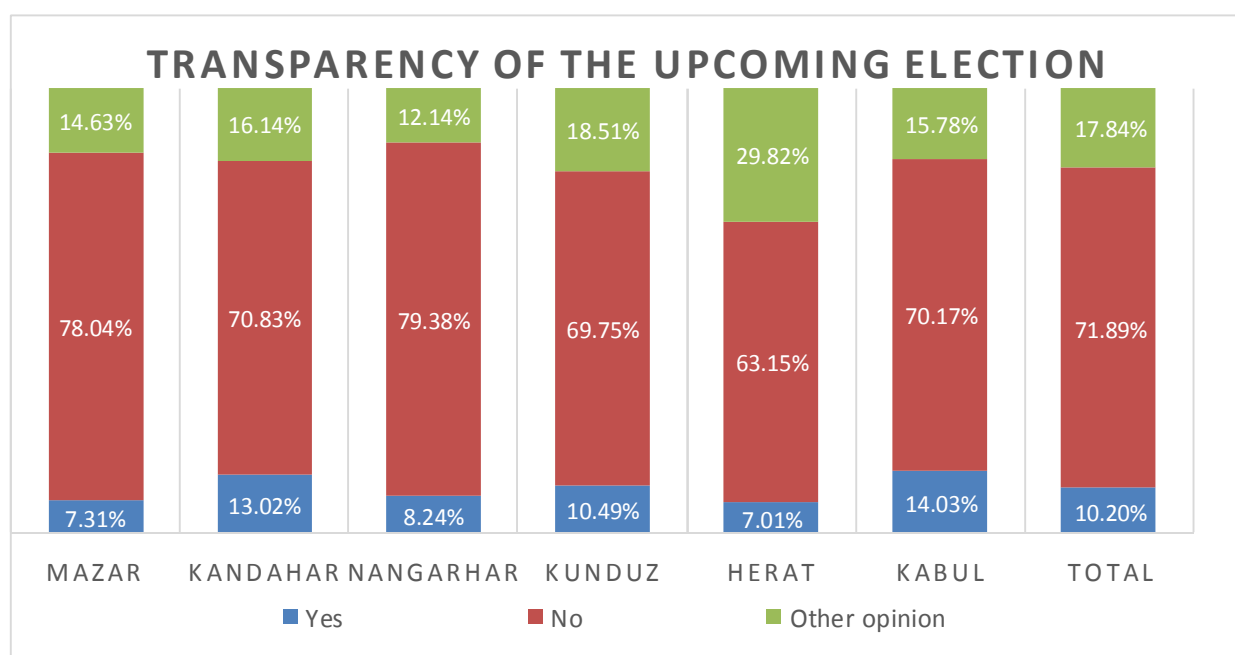
On the other hand, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) welcomed the rejection of the decree and called on Mishranu Jirga to reject the decree too. The spokesman of IECC Nader Mohseni said that the government's efforts to reform electoral system is illegitimate and said that political purposes are hidden behind it. He also added that instead of reforming electoral system the decree has emphasized on changing the commissioners and increasing the role of foreigners in election affairs.

There is also some analysis that electoral reform is mostly focused on 50-50 division of the commissions and commissioners and in this case the electoral bodies would lose their independence and independent candidates would not make their way to the parliament. Therefore, instead of changing the individuals the government must focus on bringing real reforms in the electoral system.

People’s view about electoral reforms (survey)

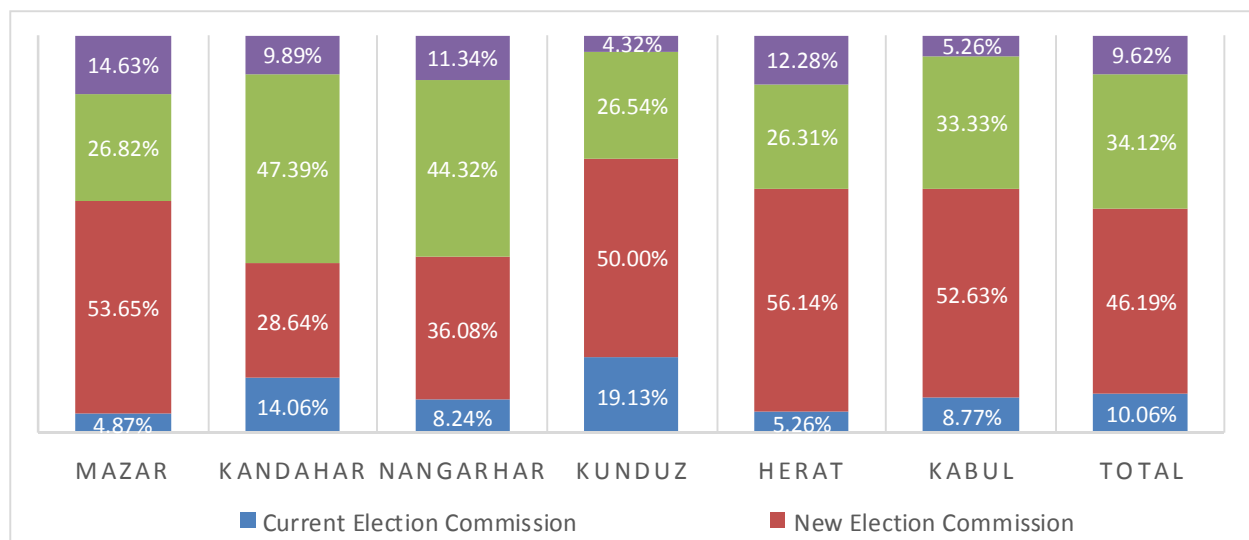
A survey by the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies show that the majority of the people are not optimist about the transparency of the upcoming Parliamentary election. Based on the survey 71.89% of the people believe that the upcoming parliamentary election would not be transparent and independent and only 10.2% says that the upcoming parliamentary election will be transparent and independent. In this regard most of the pessimism is recorded in Nangarhar and Balkh provinces. (For further info see Chart-1)

Chart-1: will the upcoming Parliamentary election be transparent and independent?



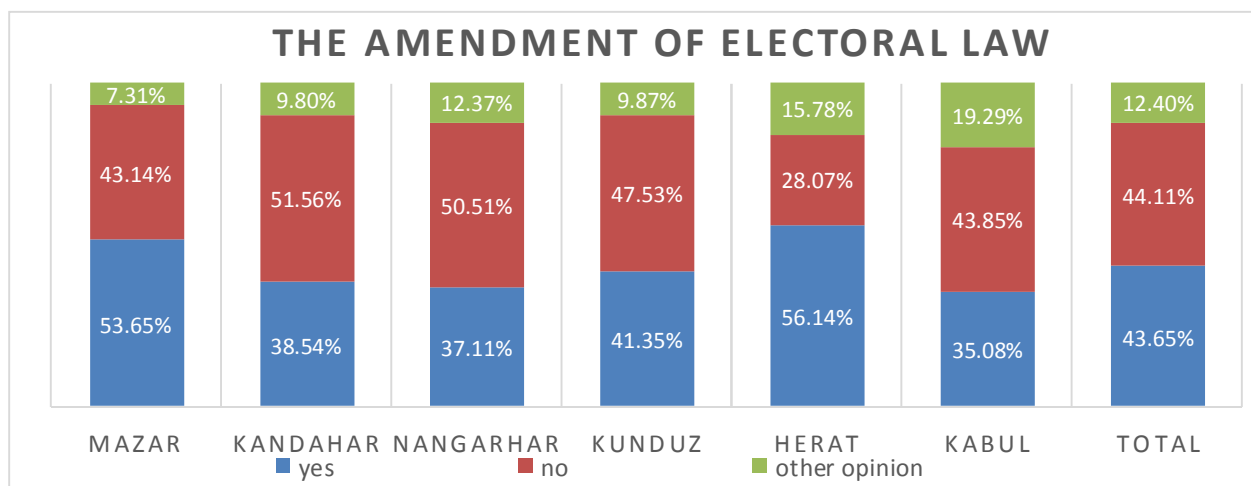
According to the survey, the participants of the survey had various opinions about the institutions that would hold the election. Most of the interviewees (46.9%) say that the election would be held by a New Independent Election Commission; 34.11% believe that the election would be conducted by the current commission after bringing reforms in it; and only 10.06% have said that the current commission would hold the election. (For more information see Chart-2)

Chart-2: who would conduct the upcoming Parliamentary election?



People have various opinions about the government’s efforts to amend the electoral law in the past two years. 44.11% say that these efforts are not correct while 43.65% others believe that these efforts are correct. (See Chart-3)

Chart-3: do you think that the government is on the right track to reform the electoral system?



Conclusion

The process of electoral reforms which was a precondition to hold the elections was very slow, and given the delay in bringing electoral reforms, most of the people are not optimistic about the holding upcoming parliamentary elections. But the Presidential Palace emphasizes on holding the election on its specific date.

According to a source in Presidential Palace, despite all the problems, the upcoming parliamentary elections would be held on the mentioned date.

After rejection of the recent decree of the President on reforming the electoral system, the Presidential Office announced that it will pursue the electoral reform process after consulting the legal institutions. The Presidential Office resists that the government is committed to hold the elections on its mentioned date and therefore has appointed the financial and security committees and in this regard it will announce its decision after consulting with legal institutions. This time the government will probably send the decree to reform electoral system to the Supreme Court.

The end

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