



Abdullah to implement transitional justice

By [Meer Agha Nasrat Samimi](#) Dec 18, 2013 - 20:07

KABUL ([PAN](#)): Leading presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah on Wednesday stressed the need for credible, impartial and accountable legal institutions to implement transitional justice in the country.

In response questions from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Abdullah promised to reinforce the judicial system if he won next year's presidential ballot.

On Dec. 3, AIHRC put 17 key queries to presidential runners regarding security forces' accountability, rights of women, children and refugees, transitional justice and prisoner torture. The candidates were asked to submit their answers to the commission until Jan. 2.

If elected, Abdullah said he would introduce a system of punishment and reward to ensure accountability of security personnel. He would also consult the rights watchdog on relevant issues.

Misbehaviour with civilians was a clear human rights violation, he acknowledged, pledging to exercise his constitutional power to curb the practice. "I'll focus on enhancing cultural education of police, particularly the Afghan Local Police, and prepare them for accountability."

He identified the protection of citizens' lives, properties and dignity as one of his duties. He would honour human rights both in war and peacetime, vowed the National Coalition of Afghanistan (NCA) leader.

"I will provide security on the one hand and introduce a culture of respect for human rights within the constitutional framework on the other," he said, adding provincial prosecutors would be empowered to curb violence against women.

Dissatisfied with the current number of policewomen, the ex-foreign minister said he would encourage the recruit of females into the force. He would also take effective measures to end forced and underage marriage and improve the overall situation of women.

The NCA leader said he would outline a realistic plan for peace negotiations with militants, an initiative that would usher in a positive change. He will seek expert opinion on how to negotiate peace with the insurgents.

Condemning torture of prisoners as a brutal act, Abdullah said all human beings had equal rights. Under no circumstances, he would brook abuse of inmates and work together with rights organisations to address the issue.

He said defending children rights and providing them education and healthcare services were among his priorities. His other goals are to focus on improving security, education, national development and public welfare programmes.

He said the protection of Afghan refugees' rights, especially children's rights, would be an important item on his agenda.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/18/abdullah-implement-transitional-justice>



Tribal chiefs, civil society urge fair polls

By [Khawaja Basir Ahmad](#) Dec 19, 2013 - 15:09

KABUL ([PAN](#)): Representatives of 18 tribal councils and civil society organisations on Thursday called for solid national unity to resolve the problems facing the country.

Noor Agha Sahak, the Sahak tribe head, said a dozen tribal council and six civil society organisation chiefs met in Kabul on ways of strengthening unity and bringing lasting peace to the country.

Ghazi Nawaz Tanai, the Tani council chief, supported the idea of organising such meetings and said unity among Afghan tribes was vital to speedy progress of the country. He urged the government to strive for conducting free and fair elections in April 2014. Flawed polls would spell trouble for the country, he warned.

Mohammad Ibrahim Alokozai, another tribal chieftain, observed intra-tribe unity was all the more important at time when the peace process was underway and foreign troops were leaving Afghanistan.

Nazir Ahmadzai, a representative of nomadic Kuchis, highlighted the tribes' role in bringing unity and resolving the problems of Afghanistan over the decades.

Najibullah Nasiri, another participant, asked tribal elders to conduct such meetings more frequently. He urged the various tribes to show the spirit of patriotism.

At the end of the meeting, the participants asked the government to ensure peace and stability in the country and conduct inclusive elections.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/19/tribal-chiefs-civil-society-urge-fair-polls>



EU to observe Afghan electoral process

By [Pajhwok Report](#) Dec 20, 2013 - 12:49

KABUL ([PAN](#)): The European community has promised to continue playing an important role in ensuring that Afghanistan continues its transformation into a democratic state with a modern economy.

The assurance was held out at a one-day conference on the prospects and challenges for Afghanistan in the wake of next year's troop withdrawal. The event was organised by the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee in Brussels.

Thijs Berman, chair of the delegation for relations with Afghanistan who presided over the morning part of a conference, said the EU and its partners would still be needed to help Afghanistan.

"One thing should be clear: we owe the Afghan people our full commitment. We will have to be there to support and assist the Afghan people in finding its way to peace and stability, economic progress and equal rights for all."

Stephen Evans, assistant secretary general for [NATO](#) operations, said: "Let's be frank: Afghanistan is and will remain for some time to come reliant on external assistance and therefore for Afghanistan the road towards greater stability, development and self-sufficiency will be long and challenging."

Pierre Vimont, executive secretary general of the European External Action Service (EEAS), called next year's presidential elections an important test for the country. "The EU stands ready to help prepare the electoral process and be there to observe it..."

Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, head of EU delegation/EUSR for Afghanistan, stressed the importance of growth for the country's stability: "Not enough had been done in the past to help economic growth in Afghanistan."

He added women's rights would remain a priority. "We brought health and education to Afghan women and this will not disappear," he concluded.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/20/eu-observe-afghan-electoral-process>



Body set up to ensure poll transparency

By [Sharafuddin Stanikzai](#) Dec 21, 2013 - 18:48

HERAT CITY ([PAN](#)): A number of provincial council candidates in western Herat province on Saturday announced the creation of a new association ahead of the presidential and provincial council elections. Mohiuddin Noori, a provincial council election contender, told a gathering the objective behind establishing the association was to ensure transparency in polls. As many as 64 candidates have membership of the new forum, he said, adding that more contenders were expected to join the body in the near future. The elections are to be held in April 2014.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/21/body-set-ensure-poll-transparency>

MoI to submit poll security plan in 2 weeks

By [Khwaja Basir Ahmad Fitri](#) Dec 23, 2013 - 18:27

KABUL ([PAN](#)): The Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) on Monday announced it would be submitting a detailed security plan for the April elections to the Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) over the next two weeks.

The ministry has evaluated 3,435 polling centres out of 6,845 as normal and 945 under insurgent threats. It says 1,074 polling centers faced a low security threat and 1,132 stations medium and 259 others in remote areas faced high threats.

But the ministry spokesman, Siddiqui Siddique, told a press conference in Kabul on Monday most polling stations would be protected by Afghan security forces and only 259 stations could face challenges.

He said security for the risky polling centers would be assured over the next three months and closed voting centres would be made operational.

He said the ministry would submit a detailed election security plan to IEC over the next two weeks.

He said ensuring security for the landmark elections remained on top of the ministry's agenda for the sake of a satisfactory turnout.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/23/moi-submit-poll-security-plan-2-weeks>

IEC warns against election law violations

By [Pajhwok Report](#) Dec 23, 2013 - 16:00

KABUL ([PAN](#)): The Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) on Monday announced that presidential candidates would be allowed to start their two-month campaign from Feb. 2. Similarly, provincial council hopefuls will start their month-long electioneering from March 4, the commission said, asking candidates and political parties to comply with the timelines.

“Some instances have been noticed recently indicating campaign activities of candidates which are clearly against the provisions of the Electoral Law and regulations approved by IEC,” it said. Any action denoting electoral campaign before the period would be considered an infringement and investigated by the Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC), the panel warned.

It also accused the media of letting candidates' share their plans with the people and said such programmes amounted to a campaign that contradicted the Electoral Law.

In a statement, the commission urged all stakeholders, particularly candidates and media organisations, to act in accordance with the law. “Another issue which requires to be addressed is impartiality and non-interference by government officials.”

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/23/iec-warns-against-election-law-violations>



Opinion poll puts Dr. Abdullah in the lead

By [Pajhwok reporter](#) Dec 23, 2013 - 17:15

KABUL ([PAN](#)): A new public opinion poll regarding the April 2014 presidential elections on Monday found Dr. Abdullah, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Abdul Qayum Karzai and Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf as leading contenders.

Conducted by Soft Power Solution (SPS) in collaboration with Democracy International (DI) in 115 districts of 34 provinces, the survey polled 2,500 people of different ages and categories, including 51 percent women.

Fifty-two percent of respondents supported Dr. Abdullah, 48 percent Ashraf Ghani, 40 percent Abdul Qayyum Karzai and 27 percent Sayyaf, 25 percent Gul Agha Sherzai, 25 percent to Zalmai Rassoul, 17 percent Rahim Wardak, 16 percent Daud Sultanzoy, 15 percent Qutbuddin Hilal, 15 percent Nadir Naeem and 11 percent Amin Arsala.

On the popularity front, 92 percent voted for Dr. Abdullah, 86 percent for Ahmadzai, 81 percent for Karzai, 78 percent for Sayyaf, 65 percent for Sherzai, 62 percent for Wardak, 53 percent for Zalmai Rassoul, 39 percent for Sultanzoy, 36 percent for Naeem, 35 percent for Hilal and 35 percent for Arsala.

Thirty-two percent of interviewees believed Dr. Abdullah would work for people's economic prosperity, 28 percent chose Ahmadzai, 13 percent favoured Karzai and 10.3 percent said Sayyaf.

Similarly, 29 percent of respondents said Dr. Abdullah would win the elections, 27 percent voted for Ghani, 15 percent for Karzai, 11 percent for Sayyaf, 5.9 percent for Rassoul and 5.1 percent for Sherzai.

Key demands of those polled included improvement of the economy, establishment of industrial units, and creation of job opportunities, boosting security and building infrastructure. Combating corruption, peace with the Taliban, reconstruction and paving roads were other main demands.

According to the SPS poll, 85 percent of respondents said they would participate in the presidential and provincial council elections; only 8 percent said they won't. Most people wanted strict security, transparency and a greater turnout.

Lawlessness, ignorance and barring women from voting by their families are among the factors that may harm the election process.

However, 48 people feared chances of rigging, threats from Taliban and foreign interference would make the election less transparent and acceptable to the masses. Nineteen percent cited a weak economy and poverty as challenges to elections.

According to the poll, 33 percent believe Afghanistan is heading toward prosperity, while 34 percent have an opposite view about the future of the country. Additionally, 21 percent think Afghanistan is heading towards devastation.

Most respondents viewed the Afghan National Army (ANA), police and the Presidential Palace as popular state institutions. More than 2,000 individuals were polled.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/23/opinion-poll-puts-dr-abdullah-lead>

Survey doesn't represent all Afghans: TEFA

By [Muhammad Hassan Khetab](#) Dec 23, 2013 - 19:00

KABUL ([PAN](#)): The Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) on Monday said a recent public opinion poll on the popularity of presidential candidates did not represent Afghanistan's 30 million population.

The poll by Soft Power Solution (SPS) in collaboration with Democracy International (DI) in 115 districts of 34 provinces found Dr. Abdullah, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Abdul Qayum Karzai and Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf as leading contenders.

Fifty-two percent of 2,500 people polled supported Dr. Abdullah, 48 percent Ashraf Ghani, 40 percent Abdul Qayyum Karzai and 27 percent Sayyaf, 25 percent Gul Agha Sherzai, 25 percent to Zalmay Rassoul, 17 percent Rahim Wardak, 16 percent Daud Sultanzoy, 15 percent Qutbuddin Hilal, 15 percent Nadir Naeem and 11 percent Amin Arsala.

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But TEFA head Naeem Ayubzada viewed the survey as a campaign for the presidential candidates.

He said the survey might have pleased the leading candidates, but it could provoke negativity among those with fewer supporters.

Ayubzada told Pajhwok Afghan News cultural and economic problems and differences in rural areas should not be ignored.

The TEFA chief said the new poll could be regarded as some sort of information regarding the elections, but it did not represent the country's entire populations.

He stressed such surveys should be accurate given the sensitivity of the situation in Afghanistan.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/23/survey-doesnt-represent-all-afghans-tefa>



Seminar on challenges to polls organised

By [Mahbob Shah Mahbob](#) Dec 22, 2013 - 15:51

JALALABAD ([PAN](#)): Speakers discussed challenges to the April 2014 presidential and provincial council elections at a seminar in eastern Nangarhar province on Sunday.

Government officials and civil society representatives attended the event, organised by the Makhtag (Progress) Consultative Services in Jalalabad.

The NGO head and former Maidan Wardak governor, Halim Fidaee, told Pajhwok Afghan News the seminar was aimed to highlight the government policy on elections and related issues.

"Policy-related problems will be shared with domestic and foreign policymaking institutions," Fidaee said, adding similar seminars would be arranged in all eight zones of the country.

The continuing insurgency was a big challenge to democratic and inclusive polls, believed the ex-governor, who asked candidates to conduct campaigns across the country and induce people into taking part in the elections.

Iqbal Azizi, the former Logar governor and member of the NGO, said ballot alone guaranteed peace. Voters could bring stability to the country by exercising their franchise sagaciously, he added.

"The country's future will be determined in April 2014," Azizi observed, referring to next year's elections.

He urged countrymen to exercise their voting right in a responsible manner to ensure a brilliant future for the country.

He hailed the measures taken by the Independent Election Commission to ensure election transparency, but warned that Afghanistan's fate would continue to hang in the balance unless people were educated on the value of vote. Presidential Advisor Dilbar Jan Arman, meanwhile, welcomed the seminar as a positive step that deserved good media coverage. "Another impediment to polls is corruption, which has fuelled concerns among the masses. But the situation can be remedied if people vote wisely."

Deputy Governor Mohammad Hanif Gardiwal also praised the event as a good initiative to promote public awareness. Plans for conducting the elections efficiently in Nangarhar would be implemented, he promised.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/22/seminar-challenges-polls-organised>



Sherzai camp rejects opinion poll as illegal

By [Muhammad Hassan Khetab](#) Dec 24, 2013 - 20:55

KABUL ([PAN](#)): The election campaign team for Gul Agha Sherzai on Tuesday called a recent public opinion poll regarding the April presidential elections as irresponsible and aimed at gaining monetary benefits from domestic and foreign circles.

Released on Monday, the survey by Soft Power Solution (SPS) in collaboration with Democracy International (DI) in 115 districts of 34 provinces found the former Nangarhar governor lagging behind Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Abdul Qayum Karzai and Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf in the electoral race.

Only 25 respondents were showed supporting Sherzai behind 52 percent supporting Dr. Abdullah, 48 percent Ashraf Ghani, 40 percent Abdul Qayyum Karzai and 27 percent Sayyaf, 25 percent Zalmai Rassoul, 17 percent Rahim Wardak, 16 percent Daud Sultanzoy, 15 percent Qutbuddin Hilal, 15 percent Nadir Naeem and 11 percent Amin Arsala. Sherzai's first vice-presidential running mate, Syed Hussain Alimi Balkhi, told a news conference in Kabul they respected the freedom of speech,

but the recent survey lacked transparency in its methodology and raised several questions, which needed to be answered. He said such organisations through their selective researches wanted to confuse the masses before the electioneering began. He said it was possible the survey had been conducted for monetary benefits from some local and foreign circles.

"This survey does not represent the ground reality. If it had been done fairly, we would not have opposed it because we know we have the most supporters and we will be the winners," Balkhi said.

He said if other such groups intended to conduct similar surveys, they should assure the candidates quality, transparency and professionalism in their work, which should be monitored by representatives of the candidates.

"Our campaign team strongly condemns this opinion poll as illegal and irresponsible. We have registered our complaints with the Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)), the Election Complaints Commission ([ECC](#)), the Attorney General Office (AGO) and the Media Violations Commission (MVC) of the Information and Culture Ministry," he said.

He said all candidates should be provided a level playing field and the government should take serious measures for holding transparent elections.

Also on Monday, the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) said the public opinion poll did not represent Afghanistan's 30 million populations.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/24/sherzai-camp-rejects-opinion-poll-illegal>

Pamir residents urge Karzai for voter cards

By [Pajhwok Report](#) Dec 24, 2013 - 20:19

KABUL ([PAN](#)): President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday promised a visiting delegation from northeastern Badakhshan province to ensure reconstruction projects were implemented in their area. A statement from the President Palace said President Karzai met with elders and development council chiefs from the Pamir area of Wakhan district and listened to their demands. The elders urged Karzai to issue them the new national identity cards and voter registration cards so they could take part in the next year's elections. The elders also called for food items to be distributed to poor families in Pamir and their youth sent abroad for higher education against scholarships. In response, the president said a minister would be assigned with implementing development projects in Pamir area, saying the Cabinet would discuss projects like roads, healthcare services and education facilities for them in next meeting.

The president also directed the authorities concerned to help Pamir residents participate in the April elections and ensure they were issued identity and voter cards.



Shariah enforcement to curb militancy: Sayyaf

By [Meer Agha Nasrat Samimi](#) Dec 24, 2013 - 08:42

KABUL (PAN): Presidential contender Abdur Rab Rassoul Sayyaf, blaming the government for what he called inconsistent policies to control terrorism and ensure economic growth, says he will work out effective policies to tackle challenges. In a wide-ranging, exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, the presidential hopeful suggested implementation of the Sharia law in the country would prevent militants from perpetrating violence in the country. Also, talks should be held with the elements fuelling militancy, insurgency and Talibanisation in Afghanistan, the noted jihadi leader said, alleging the Taliban were being used as a tool by outsiders for promoting their vested interest in the war-battered country. Implementation of the criminal law would help tackle militancy, he believed, criticising the sitting government for demonstrating a weak approach to dealing with rebels. He intends to form a consensus government where officials would be appointed on the basis of experience, qualifications and credibility. Measures would be taken to curb corruption through a system of rewards and punishments in every sector. Administrative corruption and lawlessness are threatening the very fabric of society, according to Sayyaf, who said he would take accelerated steps to ensure security. He supported freedom of expression as a birth right of every individual, but underlined the need to determine its limits. If elected, holding parleys with the fighters would be among his priorities. He will ensure the freedom of expression and respect for women's rights. Asked why he had jumped into the presidential race, the former professor said his sole objective was to serve the country. He would leave no stone unturned to bring peace and prosperity to the people. The country was faced with internal as well as external challenge, he noted, saying the government's weak writ had multiplied the problems.

Weak states were always vulnerable to interference and that was why there was a dire need for Afghanistan to achieve economic self-reliance and security, he proposed. "We pray for Afghans to stand on their own feet and resolve their economic problems. Once we are stabilized, no one will dare cast an evil eye on us. We have a rich culture and a brilliant history."

Security:

Afghanistan needs a multidimensional strategy to ensure peace and security, the scholar said, lamenting as a nation "we have failed to differentiate between foes and friends". He said terrorists had been planting mines on roads before mingling into the common people and security forces would continue to face enormous problems unless foes and friends were clearly told apart.

Security forces were paying a heavy price to ensure peace in a country where funerals were offered for the masses and officials on a daily basis, he said, saluting the bravery of law-enforcement personnel.

Law of the land should be applied to everyone irrespective of their social standing, he suggested. There was a dire need to take decisive action against militants and if the government demonstrated a firm stand, militancy could be eradicated. "If I win the election, I believe we can control the insurgency through an inclusive strategy. We hope applying the law equally to militants will ensure peace," he remarked. Referring to his suggestion to differentiate between foes and friends, he said the country had too many rivals and that he planned to identify them at the right time. Once he wins the elections, no one would dare to carry out sabotage acts.

To the question whether he would hold talks with Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), he said a strategy would be worked out to listen to genuine grievances of militants and talks would be held with those fuelling the insurgency through the Taliban.

The entire world knew who was supporting the Taliban, he maintained, saying militants had no arms depots either in Spin Ghar or Tor Ghar -- the two famous mountains in Afghanistan. Their financial and logistical support was coming from outside the country, he charged.

"A weak economy and reliance on foreign states in various sectors have made the country vulnerable to foreign interference, which is a matter of concern for us," he added. He vowed to make revelations at an opportune time as to who was aiding the militancy and terrorism in Afghanistan.

"Our priority will be to hold talks with Taliban and convince them to shun violence and embrace peace. I am sure we can convince the insurgents. Being an Afghan, I know how the insurgency problem can be addressed and who is behind it," he added.

Security forces:

Lauding the efforts, sacrifices and courage of Afghan security forces, he said active and sustained support from the nation was more important than the latest technology. "I plan to utilise all domestic resources for better equipping security forces because foreign aid is never reliable as it can be squeezed anytime."

Referring to the post-2014 status of foreign forces in Afghanistan, he refused to talk in detail on the subject as the consultative Loya Jirga had already taken a decision that should be acceptable to all and sundry.

Corruption:

A proper strategy was needed to eliminate corruption, he said, promising accountability of all to curb the scourge. Judicial organs were more corrupt than other institutions, he claimed, pledging fast-paced action to discourage graft. "I will follow the trend introduced by first Caliph Abu Bakar Sadiq (RA) that every stronger is weaker to him and every weaker is stronger to him until their due rights are returned," he pledged.

He said government would be formed with consensus and every ethnic group would be given their due share in government, however, talent, competency and eligibility would dominate his rule.

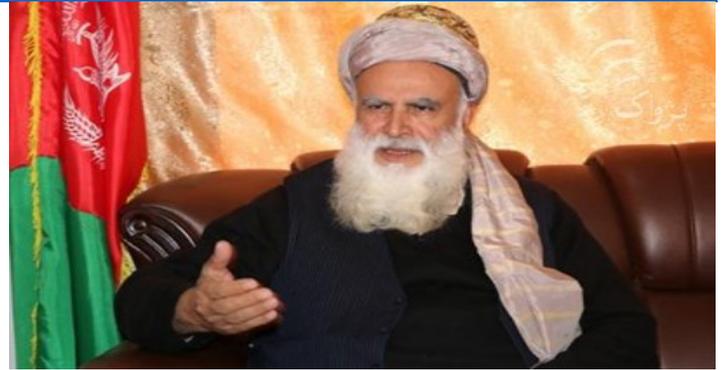
Economic development:

Peace and stability are important factors for sustainable economic growth in the country. A transparent financial system was needed to be introduced to curb cases of financial corruption, he said. He pledged his government would offer vast opportunity for investment in various sectors in a move to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country.

Natural resources of Afghanistan could expedite the country's progress, prosperity and development, who said steps would be taken to pave ground for extraction of natural resources. Minerals and other natural resources should be better utilized to attain economic self reliance, which would usher an era of prosperity in the country. "I will introduce a strategy to control spending and reining in administrative graft. If a comprehensive plan is properly pursued then the country can progress well," he said.

Education:

No doubt, a lot of progress has been made in this important area -- decades after the destruction of schools and the entire educational framework, he acknowledged. Following the Taliban's fall, he said, the whole thing was started from the scratch. Despite the killing of teachers and students, millions of children defied threats going to school, he said, stressing the need for doing more to make educational institutes self-sustaining. But it's a natural deficiency, not the result of any failure. Reinforcing these institutes is a time-consuming process.

**Financial resources:**

Sayyaf stressed Afghanistan should start making strenuous efforts right away for attaining financial self-sufficiency by exploiting its natural wealth (minerals, etc), controlling unnecessary spending and reining in administrative graft. If a comprehensive strategy was properly pursued, Afghanistan would not face any major problem, he believed.

Freedom of expression & women's rights:

Just like seeing, hearing and free movement, free speech is a basic human right, according to the religious scholar, who said Islam has laid clear principles for the implementation of this value. Other societies also have their own laws and priorities in this regard. For instance, he said, you have ears, so hearing is your right, but you don't have to overhear or snoop on others. This is forbidden by Islam. You can walk, but should not stray into prohibited areas. We are duty-bound to speak the truth, but should avoid disclosing secrets of others or speaking ill of them. Generally speaking, religion guarantees the freedom of expression. Those who can't speak the truth have been likened to a dumb Satan by the Prophet (PBUH). It's a jihad speaking the truth in front of a cruel

Transitional Justice:

"We are committed to maintain justice, which should be followed by solid reasons. I believe that a wrong doer be punished after fair and thorough investigations. We should identify who started the war inside the country and who prolonged it then we can say that now transitional justice could take place," he added.

Every government should assess every case impartially and ensure speedy justice, he said, adding he was supporting fair justice system in the country.

Foreign policy:

Referring to his foreign policy, he would forge close ties with the US and other neighbouring countries by keeping his country's interests supreme. In addition, brotherly relations would be established with all Islamic states and other countries of the world.

Link <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/12/24/shariah-enforcement-curb-militancy-sayyaf>