



BSA to keep terrorists at bay: Sherzai

By [Meer Agha Nasrat Samimi](#) Jan 16, 2014 - 12:23

KABUL (Pajhwok): Presidential contender Mohammad Shafiq Gul Agha Sherzai has warned if the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) is not signed and foreign troops leave, Afghanistan will once again emerge as a terrorist sanctuary.

“Afghanistan will turn into a terrorist safe haven again if foreign forces leave the country,” Sherzai said, insisting that the security pact with the US was in the supreme national interest.

In an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, he said: “Let me tell America Afghans want your presence here. I view the international community’s presence in the country as a source of peace, stability and development.”

An ex-governor expressed optimism the incumbent government headed by President Hamid Karzai would sign the vital pact. “Mr. President (Karzai), the entire nation feels the BSA is in Afghanistan’s interest; the consultative Loya Jirga favours the deal and intellectuals and politicians want it signed promptly.”

If the BSA was not signed and, terrorism would swarm back to Afghanistan -- a spectre forcing foreigners to return and eradicate their sanctuaries, he argued. He also delved into issues including women’s rights, freedom of expression, talks with Taliban, fighting corruption, governance, etc.

Sherzai suggested administrative corruption could be banished by establishing a strong anti-graft unit and rule of law.

While serving as governor of eastern Nangarhar, people insisted on him to contest presidential polls -- a sign of recognition of his services.

“I have jumped into the presidential race only to serve the Afghans and ensure peace and stability in the country. I believe the people of Afghanistan will support me in the elections,” he hoped.

To a question that what characteristics should have the next president, he said the upcoming president should have the abilities to ensure good governance, man of principles, maintaining unity among various ethnicities, enhance relations with neighbours, regional countries, Islamic world and international community as well.

Rule of law is vital for good governance, he said, adding establishment of peace and stability would be his top priority if he won elections.

Referring to his peace plan, he has an inclusive plan for peace which would address concerns of all stakeholder and broader talks would be held with neighbouring and Islamic states to bring eternal peace to the country.

Coming down hard on incumbent government, he lamented the current regime did not play active role for peace and security in the war-battered country.

On his plan to hold negotiations with Taliban, he said President Karzai had been asking militants to lay down arms as it he was inviting them for talks, which would not yield any tangible results.

“If I am succeeded I will move forward the peace process with Taliban successfully. I will improve ties with my neighbouring states on the first preference. I have the ability to tackle internal problems with the help of my people,” he noted. For revival of peace, it needs Jirga and some other rules, he said, adding he had a comprehensive program for durable peace in the country.

“I am a neutral person and I have no personal enmity with anyone. I took part in Jihad to discharge my religious duty and I am not involved to shed blood of others,” he added.

Taliban were a force but the government denied to accept the fact which hampered the peace process to be taken forward, he said, lamenting the fragile peace process received severe setback because the government was undecided whether or not to accept Taliban as a force.

He underlined the need to hold result-oriented talks with Taliban to put country on path to eternal peace, progress and development.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/16/bsa-keep-terrorists-bay-sherzai>



MPs asked to reverse decision in 20 days

By *Ali* Jan 15, 2014 - 22:33

JALALABAD (*PAN*): Provincial council members and candidates in eastern provinces on Wednesday strongly criticised the *Wolesi Jirga* for approving the provincial council law without authorising the bodies to monitor activities of government departments.

The lower house on Saturday approved the law, but refused to give the provincial councils the authority to oversee affairs of provincial government entities.

Provincial council members and candidates, who held a gathering in Nangarhar, set a 20-day ultimatum for the lower house to reverse its decision; otherwise they would not participate in the April provincial and presidential elections.

Nangarhar council member Zabihullah Zamarai told Pajhwok Afghan News *Wolesi Jirga* members had approved the provincial council law in an illegal manner

He said the assembly should have first declared null and void the law which had been approved by the president before passing a new law. But the *Wolesi Jirga* did not do that, he added.

“If public representatives have no authority to monitor government activities, administrative corruption will further increase.”

Provincial council candidate Maulvi Abdul Aziz Khairkhwa said they would not sit idle until they were given their right.

He said provincial council candidates had decided to announce a boycott of the elections if the *Wolesi Jirga* did not reverse its decision.

Laghman candidate Inqilabi Zawan said they were concerned about the way the provincial law was passed, saying the approval was not acceptable to them.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/15/mps-asked-reverse-decision-20-days>

Provincial council aspirants threaten to boycott polls

By *Pajhwok Report* Jan 16, 2014 - 15:20

Some provincial council candidates threaten to boycott polls

By *Pajhwok Report* Jan 16, 2014 - 15:20

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Following approval of a bill by the parliament curtailing the check and balance power of provincial councils, some contenders from western Herat and five other northern provinces on Thursday threatened to withdraw their nominations to protest against the .

Earlier, the parliament in its session last Saturday approved the law regarding the powers of provincial councils; unanimously decided provincial councils did not have the power to question government activities.

Waheedullah Qatali, provincial council head in Herat, said the newly introduced law would covert the provincial council status to advisory councils.

Members of other provincial council said the newly adopted law would change the provincial councils to regional councils and the problems of the masses would multiply instead.

Earlier, the provincial councils' members of eastern zone rejected the approval of new law.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/16/some-provincial-council-candidates-threaten-boycott-polls>

HIA vows to continue armed resistance

By *Javed Hamim Kakar* Jan 16, 2014 - 18:26

KABUL (Pajhwok): The *Hezb-i-Islami* Afghanistan (HIA) led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar, reassuring participation in the April elections, has vowed to continue its armed resistance until foreign troops exist in Afghanistan. The group, the second largest after the Taliban, has previously denied taking part in the upcoming presidential and provincial council elections due to the presence of foreign troops in the country.

However, HIA political wing chief, Dr. Ghairat Baheer, told Pajhwok Afghan News they had decided to participate in the elections.

He said Hekmatyar had asked HIA leaders in provinces through letters to ask their supporters to vote in the elections for candidates either related to the party or supportive of its ideology.

In a latest statement issued to Pajhwok Afghan News on Thursday, the HIA said it asked its supporters to participate in the election and prevent US-backed candidates from entering the Presidential Palace.

“We should defeat hypocrites, traitors and everyone who insists on a continued presence of foreign troops, giving military bases to the US and prolonging the war in Afghanistan,” the statement said.

The HIA asked its supporters to vote for a devoted Muslim, patriot and the most favourite candidate.

The group said though fair elections were not possible in the presence of foreign troops, yet it believed to emerge victorious over opponents on the political front as well.

The HIA said it would soon denounce its support for a particular presidential candidate, but warned its participation in the polls did not mean renouncing armed resistance.

“We assure the Afghans that there has been no change in our principal stance. We are not going to lay down arms or join the government.”

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/16/hia-vows-continue-armed-resistance>

Peace process thrives ahead of polls in Baghlan

By [Habibur Rahman Sherzai](#) Jan 17, 2014 - 15:19

PUL-I-KHUMRI (Pajhwok): The government-initiated peace process has gained momentum in northern Baghlan province, officials said on Friday, hoping the increasing number of militants shunning violence would help improve security for the April elections.

The provincial peace committee members say around 160 militants and their commanders had joined the reconciliation programme over the past two weeks.

The surrendering militants had been active in Dih Salah, Baghlan-i-Markazi, Burka, Nahrin and Jalgi districts, officials said, adding the reconciling men had vowed to work for peace.

Abdul Samad Stanikzai, the provincial peace committee head, told Pajhwok Afghan News people would be able to cast their vote in the upcoming elections without any fear because more and more militants were joining the peace process.

Deputy Governor Qadim Khan said they had been in direct contact with the reconciling insurgents and some of them had complaints against the government.

“The joining of peace process by militants will have a positive impact on the polls.”

The latest development comes amid complaints by residents of Burka district that they would be unable to participate in the elections because of a deteriorating law and order situation in their area.

The locals were of the view if the government did not take tangible steps to reverse the increasing influence of militants, they would be able to create problems during the elections.

Akhtar Mohammad, a former militant commander, who had joined the peace process, said he fought for three years against the government, but now he wanted to serve the country and the nation.

He said the government should ensure his security and provide him with a permanent job. Officials have promised the reconciling insurgents they would be provided all possible assistance.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/17/peace-process-thrives-ahead-polls-baghlan>



IEC's media coverage rules problematic: Nai

By [Abasin Zaheer](#) Jan 16, 2014 - 17:28

KABUL ([PAN](#)): A media advocacy group on Thursday claimed a set of rules governing media activities during the April polls outlined by the Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) had not only technical and legal issues, but also created problems for media representatives. Nai, which supports free media in Afghanistan, said the regulation had legal problems and it would create many problems for journalists trying to cover events during the landmark elections.

The IEC's Electoral Media Commission (EMC) made public the rules on Dec. 30 at the body's first-ever news conference since its creation the same month. The 12-Article Regulation on Media Activities during elections relates to activities of mass media during the April 5 elections under the Electoral Law and the Structural Law of IEC.

“The state-owned and private media shall equally treat all the candidates who are taking part in media debates regardless of their positions and shall not demonstrate a special favour to any candidate,” says the regulation.

But Nai chief executive Abdul Mujeeb Khiltwatgar said the article concerning civil rights needed to be changed. “Instead of violation, word infraction has been used in the regulation, while legally the commission can investigate violations by the media, not infractions,” he said.

He said viewpoints regarding candidates had not been incorporated in the bill, adding Article 5 of the bill insisted that presidential and provincial council candidates could not perform as programme anchors at TV and radio shows.

The article says: “Owners of media outlets, journalists, executives and radio and TV programme presenters, who have nominated themselves as candidates, cannot perform as hosts or critics.”

But Khiltwatgar said the article was in contradiction with article 25 of the labour law that asked only government officials to resign posts before jumping into the electoral fray.

“Working is the basic right of journalists, who should not be deprived of this,” he said.

He also said the rules governing media activities during the elections had called on media outlets to submit reports on income they earned from advertisement for candidates with the Media Commission each month.

He said media outlets submitted such reports to the Ministry of Finance at the end of each fiscal year and it was not necessary they should submit the same to the media commission as well.

To a question, he said they had been asking the media commission as of yesterday to share the regulation with them before publishing it, but there had been no response. He said it was either beyond the ability of the media commission members to prepare flawless rules or they had deliberately prepared the regulation to strengthen their authority.

But EMC head Farida Nekzad said the regulation had been prepared in line with recommendations by media representatives and articles 50th and 60th of the election law.

She denied the regulation had any technical or legal problems, saying the guidelines enabled media representatives to properly cover the elections. She said violators of the rules could face warnings and cash fines.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/16/iecs-media-coverage-rules-problematic-nai>



Number of insecure polling stations reduced: Daudzai
By [Azizullah Hamdard](#) Jan 18, 2014 - 18:25

KABUL (Pajhwok): Interior Minister Mohammad Umar Daudzai on Saturday said around 800 polling stations were still viewed insecure in parts of the country.

Chairing a high-level meeting here at police headquarters, he said three months back as many as 1,400 polling stations were found insecure but now “we have 800 polling stations facing militants’ threats.”

Lauding the performance of security agencies and police, he said police were working round-the-clock to ensure better security for upcoming elections.

Candidates, voters and journalists would be provided with full proof security on election days, he said, stressing the police officials to remain alert and neutral during ballots.

Earlier, the Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) in its report said 414 out of 6,845 polling stations would be closed on elections day because of militants’ presence and threat.

The report further said large number of voters would be deprived from casting their votes if election could not be conducted in those areas.

The next presidential and provincial council polls will be held on April 5, 2014.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/18/number-insecure-polling-stations-reduced-daudzai>



Tangible peace to dominate other priorities:

Nader Naeem

By *latif.zafarzai* Jan 18, 2014 - 09:16

KABUL (Pajhwok): Sardar Mohammad Nader Naeem, the presidential contender says if he is elected as president he will eliminate the menace of corruption, ensure rule of law and push forward the nascent peace process.

In an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, the presidential hopeful assured he would equally treat all Afghans and withdraw extra ordinary privileges enjoyed by some influential.

“I will primarily try my level best to tackle the menace of administrative corruption and implement rule of law in larger interests of my country,” the presidential candidate remarked.

He said the use of latest technology would be introduced to ensure transparency and good governance and materialize his promises with nation once he was elected as president of Afghanistan.

A of neutral team individuals, tribal elders and Ulamas would be formed which would be empowered to move forward the dialogue process with Taliban, he informed.

He went on to say that demands and grievances of each and every group whether they were in Kunar or Kandahar would be addressed as per their wishes by keeping interests of the country aloft.

When asked why he came forward to contest the presidential elections, he said following the decision of a tribal Jirga, he was forced to contest the elections for the presidential slot to serve the nation and country.

“Indubitably, Afghanistan faces formidable external and internal challenges. And amid this situation, the next president should have a pious Muslim and a patriotic Afghan who can sacrifice his personal interests over national interests,” he noted.

Talking about his priorities, he said accelerated steps would be taken for sustainable peace and stability and to remove the saga of growing corruption once he was elected as president.

He would try hard to create job opportunities for the country’s 65% youth---a move that would help ensure peace and tranquility in the war-torn country.

On peace and security, he said there was dire need to identify reasons behind the ongoing conflict in the country they he would be in a better position to take tangible steps for its remedy.

Criticized the incumbent government, he said the sitting government did not perform well as per his expectations during the last 12-years rule while peace remained elusive continuously.

“Trust deficit between government and armed opposition groups is a serious problem which halted progress to move forward the peace process. But I will suggest formation of a neutral team to visit the nook and corner of the county to woo the warning groups to shun violence,” he added.

He rejected the idea of complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan--- a prior demand of Taliban for peace talks--- saying the Afghan Taliban were tired to fight anymore and want peace.

Confidence building measures were needed to be adopted ahead of talks with militants, he remarked.

“Afghans need to fully back the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANA) and other security agencies for a prosperous Afghanistan,” he added.

Bullet was not the solution to achieve durable peace, he said, adding that war only brought destruction and catastrophe to the nation and country that’s why efforts were needed to establish peace in the country.

He wanted better equipment of ANA with advanced technology to face the growing challenges in the future.

On Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US, he acknowledged Afghanistan was far away from achieving self reliance and the country direly needed sustained international support.

“We need to respect the decision of the consultative Loya Jirga summoned by the president to discuss the vital security pact,” he added.

“I hope the BSA will be signed in near future despite considerable delay to ink the vital security agreement,” he hoped. Criticizing President Hamid Karzai for setting conditions to sign the BSA, he said those condition should have been finalized with the foreigners much earlier.

“The BSA is in the interest of Afghanistan,” he added.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/18/tangible-peace-dominate-other-priorities-nader-naeem>



Akbarzada fears no voting in 5 Ghazni towns

By [Saifullah Maftoon](#) Jan 19, 2014 - 16:19

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): The governor on Sunday feared voting in the April presidential and provincial council elections would not take place in five districts of southern Ghazni province because of security concerns.

Musa Khan Akbarzada told Pajhwok Afghan News Giro, Zankhan, Ab Band, Rashidan and Khugyani districts were considered to be insecure.

He acknowledged polls could not be held in Nawa district because Taliban militants had been in control there over the past seven years.

Residents of the ethnic Pashtun dominated districts say they had lodged many complaints with the authorities about the growing insecurity in their areas.

In the complaints, they have urged the government to improve the situation in the lead up to the landmark elections.

Mohammad Iqbal, a resident of Andar district, said elections were possible only when Afghan Local Police (ALP) had a strong control of the town.

Security officials say of 6,845 polling stations nationwide, as many as 414 would stay shut on the election day for security reasons.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/19/akbarzada-fears-no-voting-5-ghazni-towns>

No foreign meddling to ensure fair vote: Karzai

By [Pajhwok Report](#) Jan 20, 2014 - 20:42

KABUL (Pajhwok): President Hamid Karzai on Monday said Afghanistan could hold transparent elections due on April 5 if foreign interference was not allowed in the process. The president was addressing a meeting attended by Interior Ministry officials and police chiefs from all the 34 provinces at the Presidential Palace, his office said.

Karzai praised Afghan security forces for their sacrifices in the line of duty and defending the country and the people, a statement issued from his office said.

He said Afghan security forces should bravely protect the countrymen at a time when Afghanistan was passing through a critical juncture in its history.

Afghans needed to be courageous and wise in steering the country out of the turmoil, he stressed.

“As owners of this ancient and honourable country, we should not bow to any pressure that comes from outside through propagandas and should only think about future prosperity of our country and people.”

The president called the Interior Ministry’s report on security of polling centres as promising, adding the report showed the April vote would be transparent than the previous ones, but stressed foreign interferences should not be allowed in the election affairs.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/20/no-foreign-meddling-ensure-fair-vote-karzai>



Rule of law a panacea to militancy: Amin Arsula

By [Meer Agha Nasrat Samimi](#) Jan 20, 2014 - 08:38

KABUL (Pajhwok): Presidential contender Hidayat Amin Arsula says good governance, rule of law and speedy dispensation of justice tend to discourage the scourge of growing militancy and instability in Afghanistan.

In his exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News he promised to ensure sustainable economic growth, rule of law, speedy justice and attract foreign and local investment with the support of masses once he won the presidential ballots. The presidential hopeful said he would rule in way which would have no reason for militants to fight a useless war in Afghanistan anymore.

“We need to transform the militants’ agenda of insurgency into development and progress of Afghanistan through good governance. Afghans are peace loving people and weary of war and fighting. They want development and prosperity in the country,” Arsula added.

Referring to the bilateral security agreement (BSA) between Kabul and Washington, he said conditions for signing the vital pact were the collective demand of Afghans; however, the agreement was in larger interests of country.

Serious efforts were needed for holding result-oriented talks with Taliban, he said, adding that the nascent peace process would take time and could not be finalized in months.

The presidential runner went on to say if Taliban continued to insist upon complete withdrawal of foreign troops then the militants should wait for another ten years.

Taliban seemed to have softened their stance regarding the complete withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, he said, adding that the 2014 would see multiple changes in the country in terms of militants groups' tactics and other developments.

He broadly talked about his future plans with special reference on governance, security pact with the US, economic development, education, foreign policy and current situation of the country.

Talented and professional individuals would be adjusted on key and relevant government positions---a move that would help cease corruption--- he added.

"Every Afghan wants to serve the country. And I am Afghan and want to contribute to the progress, prosperity and development of my country even in hard times. When Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan I was working at the World Bank (WB). I prompted to quit my job and join Mujahideen ranks for the freedom of my country. Now, I have decided to serve Afghanistan and to help resolve problems of my people," he noted.

The next president of Afghanistan should be an experienced person, committed and patriotic, he added.

Talking about his priorities, he said: "We need to identify our problems and then chalk out a broad strategy to resolve them. We need to tighten our security, stabilize economy and ensure good governance in all government institutions."

The equipment of Afghan security forces would be among his top priorities after winning the elections, he said, adding that he had in his mind to introduce measures for the social security of Afghan citizens. He said weak economy, growing corruption and absence of dispensation of speedy justice were among factors contributing to lawlessness and insecurity and there was dire need to work with tandem to ameliorate things. Most of the foreign troops would leave Afghanistan by the end of this year while the remaining would train Afghan security forces, he said, adding that talks with Taliban were essential as wars were finally ended through negotiations.

He expressed optimism Taliban would join peace talks and the country could then be put back on track to achieve progress and prosperity. On signing the security pact with the US, he said BSA was in larger interests of Afghanistan and representatives of the people of Afghanistan had already favored the agreement during the consultative Loya Jirga formed on the advice of president to discuss the pact.

"The sitting government should not delay signing the vital security pact," he urged. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/20/rule-law-panacea-militancy-amin-arsala>

313 new places designated as polling sites: IEC

By [Meer Agha Nasrat Samimi](#) Jan 20, 2014 - 18:20

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) has designated 313 new places nationwide as polling stations for the April elections and has sent a list in this regard to security organs, an official said on Monday.

The move would increase by 20 percent the number of polling stations in each province, keeping in view the existing polling centres, with southern Zabol province being prioritised in this regard, IEC spokesman Noor Mohammad Noor told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He said in the previous elections, they observed there had been a long distance between polling centres in Zabol, where more new polling sites had been approved than other provinces.

Noor said the list of new sites had been handed over to security organs so they could come up with security plans.

With no response from security organs as yet, he said the new sites were in secure areas. "We want to increase the number of polling centres in all provinces by 20 percent based on a survey across the country."

The announcement comes amid concerns 414 polling stations would stay shut in various provinces on the election day.

According to the Ministry of Interior's election security report, of 6845 polling stations nationwide, security for 414 could not be ensured in 11 provinces.

The IEC says the polling stations to be closed are situated in Badghis, Ghor, Farah, Helmand, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul, Parwan, Kapisa, Nuristan, Kunar and Laghman.

With the presidential and provincial council elections 75 days away, IEC officials say 90 percent of sensitive electoral materials such as ballot papers and indelible ink have arrived in Afghanistan from abroad.

Noor said the materials had been brought from the UAE, China and Spain and the remaining 10 percent materials would reach Kabul soon.

Link: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/20/313-new-places-designated-polling-sites-iec>



No one has right to interfere in Afghan elections: US envoy By [Mohammad Haroon](#) Jan 21, 2014 - 20:55

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): A US diplomat on Tuesday said no one has the right to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs and the April elections, which she called an Afghan-owned and independent process to decide the country's fate.

During a visit to southeastern Khost province, Karin Decker, High Representative of the US State Department to southeastern Afghanistan, met with Khost governor Abdul Jabbar Naeemi and civil and military officials, the governor's house said in a statement.

She was accompanied by [ISAF](#) commander in the southeast, Afghan army's 203rd Thunder Military Corps commander and other senior military officials during the visit. They joined Governor Naeemi at a gathering attended by local security, civil and election officials, the statement said.

Naeemi told the delegation the security situation in the border province had improved as a result of increased coordination between security and intelligence officials, improvement in their capacity and facilities, cooperation with people, good governance and joint preparation of plans.

He said reconstruction projects and efforts at improving the education process and health services were in full swing and unaffected from insurgent threats so far.

Naeemi said they had appointed a seven-member commission as directed by the central government to ensure the April elections were held in a secure environment.

He said efforts were being made to hold transparent, inclusive and fair elections free of interference from irrelevant circles.

He said the commission would do away with the existing problems and provide a better atmosphere for conducting the ballot.

Decker said security situation, education process and reconstruction affairs in the border province appeared to be improving with the passage of time. She linked the improvement in the security situation to the trust existed between the government and the people.

She hoped the landmark elections would be held in peaceful, transparent and impartial manner.

"The United States respects the political process in Afghanistan and no outsider should interfere in the country's internal affairs," the diplomat said.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/21/no-one-has-right-interfere-afghan-elections-us-envoy>