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Pajhwok

Ministers accused of bribing lawmakers

By Khwaja Baser Ahmad

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Some Wolesi Jirga, or lower house, members on Saturday accused a number of their colleagues of receiving bribes from the ministers summoned to answer queries from MPs on governance and public interest issues.

Last week, the Wolesi Jirga unanimously decided to summon finance and interior ministers and 14 others to brief lawmakers on their failure to effectively use budgetary allocations during the outgoing fiscal year.

On Saturday, Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal was asked about “irresponsible amendments” to the budget, in addition to his ministry’s failure to spend less than 40 percent of development funds, Second Deputy Speaker Sheikh Niamatullah Ghafari said.

But Zakhilwal, rejecting criticism from some MPs, said no irresponsible changes had been made to the budget. He explained his ministry was authorised to enhance the budgetary outlay even after its approval by Parliament.

Most members expressed satisfaction with answers from the ministers. Article 92 of the Constitution says: “The assembly, on a proposal from 20 percent of its members, shall make inquiries from each minister.”

But lawmaker Wagma Safi said the interior and finance ministers' answers did not satisfy them and that some the house let them off as a result of bribes and underhand deals. "Groups of MPs rose from their seats in support of the ministers."

Without naming anyone, Safi alleged some of the members had got jobs for their relatives in the two ministries, while others received bribes and weapons licences. She claimed a number of legislators had been allowed to use armoured vehicles.

Another public representative, Gen. Nazifa Zaki, said: "The ministers were summoned to the house based on ethnic and regional considerations by certain groups that wanted to cut underhand deals with them." Without going into details, she asked: "Why MPs were not allowed to ask questions of the ministers."

Some MPs wanted the ministers to seek a fresh vote of confidence, but the administrative board accepted the explanations offered by Zakhilwal and Mohammadi.

Another representative, Abdur Rahim, remarked: "The administrative board and some lawmakers have dishonored the lower house." He also accused the ministers of bribing lawmakers.