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Karzai's decree a move toward dictatorship: MPs

by Abasin Zaheer
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KABUL (*PAN*): President Hamid Karzai's decree for sweeping reforms, including the fight against administrative corruption, was tantamount to bringing about a system of absolutism and vesting more powers in one individual, legislators alleged on Saturday.

Late on Thursday, the president listed good governance, an effective anti-corruption campaign, the rule of law and a strong economy as top priorities of his government.

Recalling his address to last month's joint sitting of parliament, Karzai's office referred to the wide-ranging reforms in the three branches of the government.

Cases against the individuals detained by police or investigated by the Attorney General Office (AGO) have to be disposed of on a fast-track basis.

High-ranking officials were ordered to refrain from nepotism and other extraneous considerations in the recruitment of technocrats and super-skilled experts.

A *Wolesi Jirga* member from northeastern Badakhshan province said the presidential directive ignored the parliament's role in monitoring government activities.

Fauzia Kofi believed that ministers should present their performance reports to the National Assembly in line with the relevant law. But the president had asked them to submit their reports to him, she added.

Karzai directed the parliament to set store by the core national interest in exercising its legislative powers and accord priority to answering urgent and genuine demands from the executive.

The authorities concerned were asked to present a comprehensive report in three months to the Council of Ministers on the first phase of the project for issuing computerised identity cards.

Similarly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was instructed to look -- in coordination with relevant state organs -- into the affairs of all Afghan diplomatic missions across the globe.

The Ministry of Justice was tasked with preparing draft laws governing elections, municipalities and AGO. The proposed laws have to be submitted to the Cabinet in six months.

But the outspoken woman MP claimed that the presidential order, while undermining parliament's supremacy, was designed to convert the system into a dictatorship. "Despite all this, we support the decree if it's really aimed at introducing reforms."

Another female lawmaker from central Daikundi province urged the president to ensure the implementation of his order for combating widespread corruption in his administration.

Sadeqizada Neili also warned some parts of the instructions could pave the ground for despotism. "I wish President Karzai should have issued the decree years ago, without pressure from the global fraternity. If he had done so earlier, the situation would have been different today."

Zaheer Saadat, a public representative from Panjsher, called the decree an attempt at hoodwinking the nation and the international community. By issuing such directives, Karzai sought to strengthen his grip on power, the parliamentarian said.