

Public to see Afghan constitution

By Daniel Cooney
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — A new constitution that will be put forward soon for ratification declares Afghanistan a Muslim state but stops short of imposing Islamic Shariah law, a contentious issue in this conservative nation, an Afghan official told The Associated Press on Sunday.

As they draw up a constitution aimed at unifying the fragmented nation, conservatives and secularists have been hotly debating how to enshrine Islam into law after years under the Taliban, who enforced a harsh version of Shariah that some Afghans recall with horror but others support.

The hard-line Taliban militia banned women from working, barred girls from school and ordered men to grow their beards long and pray five times a day, as well as carried out executions and amputations for a range of crimes.

Ratifying a constitution is crucial for Afghanistan as it lays the foundations for its first democratic elections in decades, scheduled for June. The rebuilders of Afghanistan hope that vote will be a cornerstone for political stability after 23 years of war.

A 10-day meeting of a 500-

member loya jirga, or grand council, will debate and ratify the constitution. The gathering was pushed back by two months to December after President Hamid Karzai demanded more time to finish the document.

After 11 months of work by dozens of constitutional experts and three months of public consultations in which 150,000 people submitted suggestions, a draft will likely be released this week.

The question of Shariah has been "a huge struggle" in the work on the constitution, said an Afghan official involved in the drafting.

"So far, the focus has been on trying to find a consensus," the official told the AP on condition of anonymity. But, he said, "a balance has been found."

The document's preamble declares, "Afghanistan is an Islamic state" and says its laws must be in accordance with Islam, but it does not impose Shariah, the official said.

The Taliban, who ruled most of the country from 1996 to 2001, ignored the former constitution altogether and imposed their interpretation of Shariah. After their removal, an interim administration was established

and Shariah law was dropped, is operating under an amended version of a 1964 constitution drafted under former King Mohammad Zahir Shah.

Some in Afghanistan support the version of Shariah imposed by the Taliban, others argue the Islamic law should be the law of the land — even if it's not the interpretation practiced by the Taliban, who emerged from hard-line religious schools in Pakistan.

While most Arab states define themselves as Muslim nations in their constitution, some call Shariah the basis of their laws and some make no mention of Shariah at all. Saudi Arabia enforces a version of Islamic law that is somewhat less strict than the Taliban's.

Karzai has been given a draft of the constitution for review and will release it to the public "in the next few days," Constitutional Review Commission spokesman Abdul Ghafoor Lewal said. He declined to comment on the content of the document.

Another official said it would be released Thursday or Friday, after Karzai returns from an overseas trip.

"So far, the focus has been on trying to find a consensus."

— Afghan official on constitution effort

NEWS IN BRIEF

Supposed al-Qaida tape says America is targeting Islam

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — An audiotape attributed to al-Qaida deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri and broadcast on Al-Jazeera satellite television Sunday accused the United States of trying to abolish Islam.

The tape appeared to be recent, as the speaker referred to a visit by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to India earlier this month and the Sept. 6 resignation of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas.

The tape was poor quality, but the voice sounded like al-Zawahiri's. There was no immediate way to confirm its authenticity.

"The crusade camp that is led by America... is targeting Islam and Muslims, even if it claims that it is fighting terrorism.... This campaign is seeking to abolish Islam as a doctrine and a law," the speaker said.

Al-Jazeera spokesman Jihad Ballout told The Associated Press that the station received a telephone call from an unknown person saying they had a recording. Ballout said the station would broadcast only portions of the tape.

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ISLAM AWARENESS WEEK
September 29 - October 4

World of Islam

Cultural Display & Buffet

Monday, Sept. 29 MSC 226 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Deeper Roots: History of Muslims in America

Lecture by Dr. Ihsan Bagby

Tuesday, Sept. 30 MSC 226 7:30 p.m.

Women in Islam: Oppression or Empowerment?

Lecture by Fatimah Bhutan

Wednesday, October 1 ZACH 102 7:30 p.m.

Muhammad: Man & Myth

Lecture by Mutahhir Sabree

Thursday, Oct. 2 MSC 226 7:30 p.m.

Mosque Open House

Saturday, Oct. 4 417 Stasney St. 10 a.m.-4p.m.

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