

Jirga Foils Maverick Presidential Candidate

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University lecturer exploited assembly mix-up to try to run for president.

The glorious eccentricity of the Loya Jirga process continued unabated on Thursday and Friday when a university lecturer who was not a delegate managed to enter the compound as a guest and collect 183 nominations for himself as a candidate for head of state.

Now Ghulam Farooq Nijrabi, 45, a lecturer at Kabul university's medical institute, is crying foul because his name was not included on the voting list, saying the rule which stipulated that candidates for head of state had to be members of the Loya Jirga violated international norms.

Nijrabi said he had deliberately not stood for election to the assembly because he wanted to stand for president, having been unaware of the conference regulations at the time.

Yet somehow, although the rules forbade it, his name was read out on Thursday at the beginning of the list of candidates for the presidency.

"I entered the Loya Jirga hall when I heard my name among the candidates for state presidency. Although I didn't have a delegate card, I found a guest card and entered the hall. I collected 183 signatures in half an hour, for which I have the documents," said Nijrabi, who was collaring any journalist he could find at the Intercontinental Hotel on Friday morning.

The grand assembly rules stated that a candidate for the presidency must first gather 150 signatures from the 1650 delegates.

But the conference authorities soon realised their mistake. "I wanted to talk for a while to the delegates, but Mr Qasimyar (the head of the assembly) didn't give me the right to talk. This was the deciding point for me," he said.

Nijrabi, who was an influential figure in Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami in the 1980s, said he still had political ambitions. "I am not sad I haven't been able to run for office. I am sure I'll get another chance," he said.

The grand assembly, with its fiery debates and votes, has started to throw up a number of people eager to make a name for themselves.

Delegates can be seen giving interview after interview outside the compound. And sessions often become unruly when they try to talk at the microphones.

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