

Karzai rival concedes as suicide toll rises

REUTERS, Kabul

Hamid Karzai's main rival for the Afghan presidency has conceded defeat with less than six percent of the vote count remaining.

A spokesman said on Sunday Yunus Qanuni would accept Karzai's victory despite irregularities in the October 9 election -- Afghanistan's first ever direct presidential ballot.

"We accept in the interests of the nation, because we don't want to face another crisis," Sayed Hamid Noori told Reuters when asked if Qanuni was conceding.

The move comes a day after an American woman and an Afghan girl died from wounds suffered in a Taliban suicide attack in a popular Kabul shopping street.

With under six percent of the votes left to count, incumbent Karzai remained on course to win a simple majority to avoid a run-off against the second-placed Qanuni with 16.2 percent.

"They should be finished by today and by tomorrow, probably the total boxes would have been finished and reconciled and counted," said Reginald Austin, head of the Joint Electoral Management Body's technical and logistics operations.

Several ballot boxes were set aside for an investigation into complaints of ballot-stuffing and multiple voting, but the UN spokesman said an investigative panel recommended most of them should be released from counting.

The suicide attack on Chicken Street followed a lull in militant activity over the past couple of months as US-led troops, international peacekeepers and Afghan forces stepped up security ahead of the October 9 poll.

Three Icelandic soldiers serving with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and two other Afghan civilians were among the wounded when the attacker detonated a string of grenades strapped to his waist, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Polouin, spokesman for the NATO-led mission.

A Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the attack.

Witnesses said the attacker was disguised as a beggar as he roamed Chicken Street, popular with foreigners shopping for carpets, jewel-

EU CONSTITUTION

Britain to hold vote in 2006

REUTERS, London

Britain will have its promised referendum on the European Union's new constitution in early 2006, just weeks after the country ends its six-month presidency of the 25-nation bloc, a newspaper has reported.

The Sunday Telegraph said the referendum on the constitution that attempts to streamline the EU's leaden decision-making processes would be held in mid-March 2006, two and a half months after Britain hands over the baton of the bloc's leadership.

"We can't do it while we are holding the presidency. But we need to strike while the iron is hot," it quoted Foreign Secretary Jack Straw as telling colleagues.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, who unexpectedly promised a referendum on the constitution after it was finally approved earlier this year, goes to Italy on Friday to sign the final document.

An ICM poll last month found 59 percent of Britons against the constitution.

Blair's office declined on

Captors kill 2 failing to get ransom

UNB, Keraniganj

Two persons abducted on Wednesday for ransom have been slaughtered at Nazirerbagh in Keraniganj.

Police said Nuruzzaman, 28 and Nasir, 30, both tailors, were abducted from Aminpara of Chunkutia. The abductors demanded a ransom of Tk 1 lakh. Failing to realise the money, they slaughtered the two and dumped the bodies into a ditch at Nazirerbagh.

Police arrested one of the abductors named Sumon at Chunkutia yesterday. On his confessional statement, they recovered the body of Nuruzzaman from the ditch.

The body of another victim, Nasir, was recovered on Thursday from the same ditch. No one could identify him at that time. The body was sent to hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed against eight people including identified criminals Arif, Sumon, Anwar and Asad for murder of the two.

Cobra arrestee dies

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was broken and had bandages but no mark of bullet injury was found there.

Meanwhile, Enayet's sister Nasima Begum told reporters at the DMCH that Cobra men beat his brother mercilessly that led to his death.

Enayet arrived in Dhaka from Barguna on Tuesday morning for his cousin's treatment, said Nasima, claiming that her brother, a microbus driver, was not accused in any criminal cases.

"Enayet took me to a clinic at Mirpur and as I came out of the clinic after medical check-up at about 12noon, I found him surrounded by a couple of men who took him in a vehicle," said Enayet's cousin Mariam.

Police sent the body to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

BCL leader dies

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said Feroz was hiding for fear of police harassment as his opponents using their political power filed 'false cases' against him.

No case was filed till late in the evening.

Karwan Bazar

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Karwan Bazar urged the government to rid them of the menace by taking stern action against the extortionists.

About 5,000 Karwan Bazar businesspersons yesterday brought out a protest procession at the market. They demanded arrest and punishment of the extortionists, especially of Murgi Faruque and his accomplices.

Leaders of Karwan Bazar Market Federation alleged operatives of Faruque have killed seven businessmen -- Abbas, Manik, Faruq, Dano Mizan, Khokan, Jubo and Haru who failed to oblige them with money.

Faruque was the main associate of Pichchi Hannan, who was killed in a 'shootout' between Rab and his accomplices in Savar on August 6.

"Murgi Faruque and his accomplices have taken over after Pichchi Hannan's death," said Khan Mohammed Shahabuddin, general secretary of the federation.

Businesspersons had to give Tk 7,000 to extortionists for each truckload of tomatoes before Rab operations began, he said.

Although the situation improved, the extortionists are back again ahead of the Eid, he added.

"They extorted Tk 25,000 from Yunus Patowary, a vegetable trader of the market, two days back and snatched two mobile phones from traders Kalimullah and Abdul Kader yesterday," said Nabi Solaiman, president of the federation.

The leaders hailed Rab activities to eliminate crimes from the country.

Janajuddho

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order situation further worsened in Chuadanga. According to data available here from police record and newspaper reports, at least 153 people were killed in last nine months in Chuadanga alone, which is higher than in any other districts of the southwestern region.

Saudi citizenship

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new law would take at least four months to come into effect.

Now the question remains how many Bangladeshis would be eligible to apply for the citizenship as the Saudi government would give priority to those who hold degrees in medicine, computer science and other branches of science and technology. "The jobs required by the country will change in accordance with new developments," a Saudi official said.

Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Quamrul Islam said he is waiting to receive detailed information about the amended Saudi law from the Bangladesh mission in Riyadh.

In reply to a question, Islam said around 2,000 doctors and engineers are now employed in Saudi Arabia while a vast number is working in departments of water and sewerage, electricity, hotel etc. He, however, welcomed the new law.

When contacted, Bangladesh Consul General Ashraf Uddin told the news agency that it is not yet clear how many Bangladeshi expatriates would get the benefit under the new citizenship law. He said most of the Bangladeshis employed in the kingdom are labourers.

Criminal dies

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The news release said Shohag was raised in a family of criminals. His father was accused of murder. His elder brother Shahid Morol was accused of 12 criminal offences, and younger brothers Badal and Johnny, are in Khulna jail.

Moni, his youngest brother and accused of arms and drugs smuggling, is now on the run.

Hearing the news of Shohag's death, jubilant locals brought out a procession in East Baniakhamar at 10:30am yesterday.

WB, ADB pledge \$390m

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allocated for regular maintenance and rehabilitation activities," said the letter.

A country programme confirmation mission of the ADB will visit Bangladesh at the end of this month to suggest the modality of fund reallocation from the existing portfolio and determine the priority sectors for disbursement.

On the other hand, the WB will provide \$190 million including \$40 million as budget support. The rest will be mobilised through reallocation of existing portfolio.

The bank will extend the budget support to compensate for the expenses incurred in the initial rehabilitation activities undertaken to assist the affected people through agriculture rehabilitation and initial repair of infrastructure networks.

The rehabilitation of key infrastructure will however cost \$140 million, including \$50 million for roads and bridges, \$45 million for damaged schools, \$15 million for municipal bodies, \$15 million for water management, \$9.5 million for water supply and sanitation, and \$5.5 million for agriculture.

Apart from this, the bank will provide a \$10 million credit line for livelihood rehabilitation to be disbursed through Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation.

The WB has prepared a list of ongoing projects for potential reallocation of funds that includes Primary Education Development Programme II, Health and Population Programme II, Dhaka

Urban Transport Project, Private Sector Infrastructure Development Project, and Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project.

In line with the bank's suggestion, the ERD has already consulted the ministries concerned and appraised the WB of their no-objection to the reallocation plan.

Earlier, a joint mission of WB and ADB in September assessed flood losses and assured the government of extending assistance in three phases. The second phase commitment will be made after the government makes a need assessment.

"The final amount of financial assistance for the post-flood recovery programme will be based on the assessment made by the mission, taking into consideration the country's implementation capacity and availability of incremental funds," the letter said.

The WB, however, proposed to support medium term rehabilitation of flood management infrastructure and initial disaster preparedness activities in FY 2004-05 through additional resources to the tune of about \$40 million from its soft-loan window, International Development Association (IDA).

The WB and ADB have estimated \$2.16 billion assets and output loss during the July-August floods. The estimated need for public sector rehabilitation and reconstruction related to physical infrastructure is between \$669 million and \$714 million.

Al-Haramain

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affairs, the BB was unable to verify the claims.

The BB officials, while examining the Al-Haramain account with Islamic Bank's Uttara branch, also found that funds were transferred through TT (telephonic transfer) from the branch to accounts of some individuals apart from Al-Haramain's Rangpur and Cox's Bazar branches.

The enquiry also revealed that an Al-Haramain staff deposited Tk 14 lakh in the NGO's account with Islamic Bank's Uttara branch in June last year. The amount was sent to the account with the bank's Cox's Bazar branch held by Hossain Ali, a teacher who immediately drew the money.

The Cox's Bazar branch manager told the investigators that he did not know about the source of income of Hossain Ali, neither did he know about him.

The investigators observed that these sorts of transactions are suspicious and against regulations, but the Islamic Bank branches concerned did not report that clear breach of BB regulations.

The central bank fined Islamic Bank and Al-Arafah Bank Tk 50,000 each for not complying with BB directives last month.

The United Nations Sanctions Committee asked the government in January to freeze accounts of Al-Haramain on the grounds that it has been listed as an al-Qaeda associate.

The foreign ministry directed the central bank in late January to take steps against the organisation.

The BB then sent a circular to all banks to freeze Al-Haramain accounts and immediately report the NGO's transaction profiles to the central bank.

Only Oriental Bank informed the central bank that \$1,031was in a foreign currency account held by Al Haramain at their VIP Road branch.

Al-Haramain was registered with the Bureau of NGO Affairs in 1992 and ran orphanages and development programmes based on Islamic teachings and values, the probe report stated.

Banking and NGO bureau sources say there are several other Islamic NGOs and no probe has been done as to how funds are brought from the Middle East.

Between 1997 and June 2004, Tk 27 crore in Saudi funds were released by several banks, including Islamic Bank, according to the probe report.

Officials at the bureau said there are some 200 foreign NGOs in Bangladesh. But funds for Islamic NGOs, sourced largely from the Middle East, have dried up.

The ebb in the funds follows tight UN leash on fund transactions of Islamic NGOs and tight Saudi government restrictions on private international monetary transactions.

NGOs received \$313 million in foreign donor funds last fiscal year, compared to \$278 million the year before.

SC Bar

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the judges' appointment but decided to abstain from joining the get together if the new judges were present there.

SCBA President Rakanuddin Mahmud said the new judges should not be given any task at the moment. Since question has been raised about their efficiency and ability, they should first read more about their tasks, he told reporters yesterday.

The Supreme Court Bar is willing to meet the prime minister to discuss the appointment of new judges, Rakanuddin said.

The SCBA started boycotting the CJ's court in protest against the August 22 appointment of 19 additional judges to the High Court, terming it 'political appointment.' The boycott started on August 30, two days before the court went on summer vacation.

The SC Bar, however, on Saturday decided to join the CJ's court ending its boycott and requested the CJ to take initiatives to resolve the matter.

Bar Secretary Bashir Ahmed said he had contacted with the CJ's office before beginning of yesterday's get together to know about the presence of the new judges at the function but he did not get any response. "We boycotted the function as the new judges were present there," he told The Daily Star.

The Supreme Court will go on Eid vacation from November 11 to 22. Before reopening of the court after the vacation, the SCBA will sit again to decide its position on the boycott reviewing the latest development, the bar secretary said.

Contractor

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The staffs claimed Apollo was an assistant editor of the daily and showed his visiting card to reporters at the DMCH.

However, Shafee Billah Jabber, the daily's editor, denied the claim.

Shafee told The Daily Star yesterday that Apollo was his friend who used to visit him. "His business rivals might have killed him," he said.

Pak PM

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Dhaka and Islamabad would concentrate on how existing bilateral relations could be made more meaningful. Bangladesh will continue to raise the bilateral issues like repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in "all bilateral discussions".

Meanwhile, the foreign minister leaves for New Delhi on October 31 as special envoy of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to hand over her letter to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh inviting him to attend the forthcoming Saarc summit in Dhaka.

He will call on Singh on November 1.

This will be Khan's first visit to a Saarc capital as special envoy of the prime minister as Dhaka hosts the 13th summit of the regional forum January 9-11.

During his stay in Delhi, Khan will hold bilateral meeting with his Indian counterpart Nataraw Singh.

AL men

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AL and its front organisations' men gathered in front of the AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in processions from different parts of the city since 2:30 pm. The main procession, organised by Dhaka city unit AL, began at about 3:30 pm and reached the Bahadur Shah Park after an hour and a half.

Prior to the procession, senior leaders of the party asked the government to check the upward spiral of prices within a month or resign.

The AL leaders said profiteering by the pro-government businessmen has pushed the prices up, which has caused untold sufferings to poor people during Ramadan.

Placing the comparative price lists of previous government of AL and the present government of BNP-Jaamat alliance, they said prices of essentials were stable during the five-year rule of the AL government from 1996 to 2001.

AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu addressed the pre-procession rally as the chief guest.

"Prices of essentials have been increasing sharply since the present government assumed power," Amu said adding, "But they seem totally indifferent to the situation that has been worsening day by day."

Presided over by Mohammad Hanif, the pre-procession rally was addressed, among others, by Abdur Razzak, Motia Chowdhury, Mukul Bose and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

B Chy, Kamal

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and poverty alleviation. Any political party will be able to use the Gono Ishtehar, said Mahi B Chowdhury, coordinator of the Gono Ishtehar Kariyokrom.

BDB and Oikya Mancha formally published a joint declaration in the capital on September 26 with a view to starting activities to form the Gono Ishtehar incorporating public demands.

Among others, BDB Secretary General Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan, spokesmen Mahi B Chowdhury MP and Mofizul Islam Kamal, and engineer Abul Kashem of Oikya Mancha will be present at the dialogue.

49 Iraqi troops

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more visible role in counter-insurgency operations in recent months and the US- backed government sees them as a key weapon in its drive to win back control of all rebel areas before elections in January.

US DIPLOMAT KILLED

A US embassy spokesman said a diplomatic security officer had been killed by "indirect fire" about 5 a.m. on Sunday at Camp Victory, a sprawling US military headquarters near the airport which comes under frequent rebel attack.

"I mourn the loss of one of our own today in Baghdad. Assistant Regional Security Officer Ed Seitz... was a brave American, dedicated to his country," Secretary of State Colin Powell said in a statement.

Seitz was the first American diplomat known to have been killed in Iraq since last year's US-led invasion.

US warplanes pounded targets in Falluja, the toughest guerrilla stronghold, yesterday, killing five people, witnesses said. Hospital officials said the dead were civilians.

The US military said a "precision" strike had destroyed a known enemy command and control post in northern Falluja.

US forces have stepped up air strikes and other attacks in the city west of Baghdad in a campaign they say is aimed at insurgents and foreign fighters led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who has a \$25 million US bounty on his head.

Falluja residents say most of the victims of the raids are civilians and deny any knowledge of Zarqawi, who has claimed responsibility for hostage beheadings, suicide bombings and other attacks.

Insurgent commanders in Falluja said they were not holding foreign hostage Margaret Hassan and condemned her kidnapping.

"This woman works for a humanitarian organization. She should not have been kidnapped," said the emir, or commander, of one guerrilla group, who asked not to be named.

Commanders of five separate guerrilla groups interviewed in Falluja said they were not holding Hassan and had seen no evidence that Zarqawi's organization had kidnapped her.

"She had been living in Iraq for 30 years and she was a humanitarian. The resistance did not kidnap her because this would have left a bad impression of the resistance in the world," said another commander.

US Muslim leaders

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for rallying the nation view after September 11, transforming Afghanistan and "beginning to reshape a Middle East policy too long centered on accommodating friendly dictators."

But the Post faulted Bush for exaggerating intelligence about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, alienating allies unnecessarily and ignoring advice on post-war conditions in Iraq.

"The damage caused by that willful indifference is incalculable," the Post said, noting that US prestige in much of the world is at an "historic low."

"(AMT) is calling on Muslims nationwide to cast a protest vote for Sen. John Kerry," the group said, expressing "disappointment" with what it described as an "insensitive" Bush administration.

"Mindful of disagreements with Sen. Kerry on some domestic and international issues, including the war in Iraq, we are willing to work with him to help restore due process and equal justice in accordance with the US constitution," the AMT endorsement said.

Explaining its stance, the panel blamed the Kerry campaign's failure to publicly commit to a broad civil rights agenda that included prohibitions on ex-post facto laws, secret evidence and secret proceedings.

"The Democrats have not shown the courage of their convictions," said task force chairman Agha Saeed.

Kerry campaign aides did not return repeated calls seeking comment, but privately, one senior figure close to the AMT claimed the Kerry campaign had "stonewalled" the panel for fear of alienating Jewish voters.

In any event, a string of polls, taken before and after the endorsement decision, show most Muslims will back the Massachusetts senator over the Republican incumbent, President George W. Bush, on November 2.

A poll released this week by the Council on American-Islamic Relations put support for Kerry amongst likely US Muslim voters at 80 percent, compared to a mere two percent for the president.

Their support could be important given their numbers in swing states such as Ohio, Florida and Michigan, where Kerry is in a virtual dead heat with Bush.

For many, however, it will be a tactical vote rather than a heart-felt one.

"I'm sorry to say it, but that's the way it is," said Nidal Elayan, 38, who is backing Kerry, even though "he's just like Bush on the Middle East and he voted for the Patriot Act."

In the eyes of the Palestinian-born computer programmer, the imperative this election year is to get rid of Bush, and voting one's conscience is a luxury he cannot afford.

Many in the grassroots community and even the leadership favour the independent candidate Ralph Nader -- but not enough to risk a Bush victory. A long-shot, Nader is only on the ballot in 34 of 50 states.

"A lot of Muslims want to vote on principle for Nader," said community activist Haaris Ahmad on the sidelines of a Muslim election forum in suburban Detroit this month.

"Most of the community is not excited about voting for Kerry. He hasn't offered us much of an alternative to Bush. He hasn't reached out to us. Unfortunately, we have no choice."

Polls show the overarching issue for most of the three million registered Muslim voters is civil liberties, and the perceived erosion of them by Bush's Republican administration in its prosecution of the war on terror.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also front and center for many Arabs along with the situation in Iraq.

The community is not monolithic, however, and Arab-Americans are a minority of the nation's Muslim Americans.

The majority, like Sikander Khatri, come from South Asia. His most pressing concern is the administration's handling of Iraq.

"I'm glad Saddam Hussein is out of power, but right now he's sitting pretty in a prison cell and innocent people are getting killed," the 57-year-old businessman said.

"We're making enemies left and right. We're destabilising the whole region ... and I don't see any end to it," he said. "I'm a core Republican, but I'm voting Kerry."

Poor oblivious of OMS

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of rice by 11:00am or by noon at the latest.

Locals and shopkeepers at Rampura kitchen market said they have not seen any OMS centre in the area although they have come to know about the programme through television.

An OMS centre at Malibagh kitchen market closed at 11:30 am. The dealer was not found there. One of the two workers at the centre said, "We have sold out our today's allotment."

Khadiza Begum, who runs a tea stall beside the market, said with annoyance, "They (dealer) close the centre after giving OMS rice to only a few people and then sell the rest at higher prices."

A cobbler at the entrance to the market said he is not aware of sale of government-allotted rice at reduced price. Many others also said they knew nothing about it.

The OMS centre at Shahjahanpur Railway Super Market also closed by 11:30am and two workers there said the day's allotment was already sold out.

Local people and traders at Khilgaon kitchen market said there is no OMS centre at the market.

Reports received from Rajshahi said sale of OMS rice yesterday ended by 11:00 am with no major irregularities.

Our Barisal correspondent reported that wholesale price of rice came down by Tk 50 to 100 per quintal yesterday but it had no impact on the retail price.

OMS drive has not yet started in Pirojpur because of political pressure and indecision on dealer recruitment.

Fourteen dealers in Gournadi upazila have received 15 tonnes of OMS rice with no sale centre opened as yet.

In Barguna, the authorities initiated fresh recruitment of OMS dealers yesterday, and the programme is yet to start.

Our Bogra correspondent said many people had to return empty handed from the OMS centres as the day's allotment was too inadequate to meet the requirement.