

## 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," Saeed 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 for 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 Poulin, 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-

lery and antiques.

The street used to be a hippy hangout during the 1960s and early 70s, but today the foreigners are more likely to be aid workers and journalists here to see Afghanistan's transition to some sort of democracy.

The US embassy confirmed an American had been killed in the blast but was unable to release further details, though other media reported the dead woman was in her early twenties and worked for a translation company.

The Afghan girl was between 10 and 12 years old, according to hospital workers.

Suicide attacks are few, though there was a series in early 2003, the last of which killed four German peacekeepers and wounded 29 others in a convoy on the outskirts of Kabul.

"We want an end to the violence, and we want security and that was the main reason why we voted," Haji Nawab, a storekeeper on Chicken Street, told Reuters as shops reopened for business, some with windows broken by the blast.

Two weeks ago, more than eight million Afghans braved Taliban threats of violence to vote in a poll they hoped would mark a beginning of the end to a quarter century of violence.

Karzai's share of the vote has slipped to 55.3 percent after holding around 60 percent for most of the time since counting began. But votes from several provinces dominated by fellow ethnic Pashtuns had still to be tallied, giving Karzai's camp confidence that the slip was a temporary blip.

Perceived as handpicked by Washington since being placed at the head of an interim government after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Karzai was hoping for a mandate that will improve his credentials as a leader to all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups.

If Karzai is declared the official victor before the US election on November 2, US President George W. Bush is expected to take credit for his decision to send troops to Afghanistan three years ago.

US-led forces were sent to smash the al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11 attacks on the United States, and to drive his Taliban protectors from power.

## 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

Saturday to confirm the 2006 date.

"No date has yet been fixed for the referendum. First of all the constitutional treaty has to be signed and then it will be debated in parliament," a spokesman told Reuters.

Blair, who has led his Labour Party to two consecutive and overwhelming electoral victories, is expected to win a third term in power in elections expected by mid 2005.

## Project success

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country from the field level leaders.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also spoke while BNP Joint Secretary General Harris Chowdhury conducted the meeting. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and Khulna BNP Organising Secretary Mashur Rahman MP were also on the dais. BNP MPs from Sylhet and Khulna divisions were present.

Khaleda urged the grassroots level BNP leaders to further strengthen and organise the party to face the opposition politically.

She said the BNP-led alliance had run the government for three years successfully and would also govern successfully over the rest two years. She sought cooperation from her party men to this end.

Listing the government's various anticrime steps, the prime minister assured the party leaders that the government is working to curb crimes.

Citing the example of fasting by Muslims in Ramadan and celebration of Durga Puja by Hindus simultaneously in peace and amity in Bangladesh, she said many foreigners, particularly diplomats based in Dhaka, appreciated the peaceful performance of the two religious occasions.

"They remarked that they did not see such harmony anywhere else and it would be an example," Khaleda told her party comrades.

She alleged an opposition party tried to commit criminal acts during the Durga Puja in a bid to shift the responsibility to the government, but strong security

steps foiled all evil bids.

About price spirals, she said the prices of essentials had already taken a downturn and would further go down.

## 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 12 noon, 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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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 operations 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 Kalmullah and Abdul Kader yesterday," said Nabi Salaiman, 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.

The enquiry also revealed that an Al-Haramain staff deposited Tk 14 lakh in the NGO's account with Islami Bank's Utara 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 Islami Bank branches concerned did not report that clear breach of BB regulations.

The central bank fined Islami 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

## 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 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 Islami Bank's Utara 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.

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.

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ment and loss caused by floods in 1998 and miscellaneous rehabilitation work on Teesta Barrage Project (1st level amendment).

It also adopted decision on long-term excavation programme for maintaining navigability of internal river routes under the shipping ministry and collection of ancillary machinery including three dredgers and one booster pump (2nd amendment), integrated soil fertility and fertiliser management-2nd phase (amendment), and soil research centre establishment project (amendment) under the agriculture ministry.

"The revised budget shown for the project is too high. We think it is possible to complete the project with Tk 250 to 260 crore," emerging from the meeting at the NEC auditorium Saifur told reporters.

The meeting approved 15 other development projects with a total outlay of Tk 2,530 crore including Tk 1,255 crore in project aid.

The okayed projects include Road Network Development and Maintenance Project II under the ministries of communications and women and children affairs; construction of a PC girdle bridge and a Bailey bridge over a canal including an access road over the Poysa river in Agorjhara under the communications ministry; Patuakhali bridge (amendment), Gorai bridge over the Kushtia-Rajbari road, bridge over Dakatia river in Chandpur (amendment) and Bhairab bridge projects (2nd amendment).

The meeting also took decision on Kurigram Flood Control and Irrigation Project under Water resources ministry: North unit (1st phase: flood control and sanitation portion) -- 2nd amendment.

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