

Iranian conservatives win big in parliamentary polls

AFP, Tehran

Iranian conservatives won a big majority in parliament after two rounds of elections, according to final results Saturday, but the chamber could still prove critical of controversial President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Conservatives won 69 percent of the seats, reformists 16 percent and independents more than 14 percent, Interior Minister Mostafa Pour Mohammadi told a news conference.

He was speaking a day after the second round of an election in which 82 seats in the 290-seat parliament were at stake. The first round on March 14 had already assured conservatives of overall victory.

Pour Mohammadi did not give the number of seats won by each faction. But the percentages mean that conservatives will have around 200 seats in the next parliament, reformists 50 and independents

around 40.

"My assessment is that the future parliament will be more capable (than the last), with stronger expertise. I hope there will be stronger interaction between the government and the parliament," he told reporters.

The vote for reformists -- whose hopes of mounting a significant challenge were stymied by mass pre-vote disqualifications -- appeared to have held up respectively in the second round outside Tehran.

But the reformists fared badly in the run-offs in the capital, with conservatives taking 10 out of the 11 seats having already swept up all 19 of the seats available in the first round, Pour Mohammadi said.

Just one reformist, Ali Reza Mahjoub, was set to sit in the new parliament for Tehran after squeezing into 11th place in the second round, with reformist support hit by a meagre turnout in the capital on Friday.

A conservative-controlled parliament is in any case not expected to be wholeheartedly supportive of Ahmadinejad, who has alienated many of his fellow conservatives with controversial policies and speeches.

Ahmadinejad faces a re-election battle in the summer of 2009 against a background of discontent over high inflation, and his toughest competition is expected to come from more moderate fellow conservatives.

Economists blame the president's expansionary economic policies for stoking inflation, while his provocative attacks on opponents and frequent changes to his cabinet have also stirred controversy.

Pour Mohammadi is expected to step down just days after the election he was supposed to be organising, in the ninth change to Ahmadinejad's cabinet. The minister said it was up to the president when the change is made.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Victorious Nepali Maoists face serious tests

AFP, Kathmandu

Former rebel Maoists have secured a surprise win in landmark elections to shape Nepal's political future, but the ex-insurgents will struggle to keep pledges for massive reform, analysts said.

The ultra-leftists will be the largest party by far in the constituent assembly, whose first task is to abolish the world's last Hindu monarchy and then rewrite the constitution.

But having won 217 seats in the 601-seat assembly, they will need to temper their reform agenda, said Yubaraj Ghimire, a leading magazine editor and analyst.

"The Maoists want radical socio-economic transformation, but the fact they have just won a simple majority means they will have to compromise on a lot of things," Ghimire told AFP.

The end of the monarchy -- a Maoist objective since they launched the "People's War" in 1996 -- has looked certain since the interim government agreed last year that the kingdom would be abolished in the assembly's first meeting.

But the Maoists' plans for sweeping changes, including "revolutionary" land reform combined with the use of capitalism as a tool to bring about their vision of a republican Nepal, will be more difficult.

Sandwiched between regional giants India and China, aid-dependent Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. The civil war that ended with a 2006 peace deal wrecked an already fragile economy and left 13,000 people dead.

Bijaya Ghimire, the chief economic journalist with the Kantipur

media group, described Maoist plans for Nepal's economy as "way too ambitious."

"They are talking about increasing per capita income from 350 dollars per year to 3,000 per year in 10 years, but this is impossible," said the senior analyst at Nepal's biggest private media company.

"We lack infrastructure and financial resources, and investors are not going to flood in after the Maoists come to power," he said.

Political analyst and author Bhaskar Gautam agreed the Maoists would have a tough time pushing through reforms, but said they have to be seen to be making the effort by their supporters.

"There are constraints on infrastructure and resources here, so they will be forced to depend on small economic reforms," Gautam said.

"This could push them into a situation where retaining their cadres' support will be more challenging."

Last week, Maoist leader Prachanda boasted to the Kathmandu business community about what he would achieve in power.

"We have been given a chance to lead the government and we now think that this responsibility is to bring economic miracles in the country," he said.

"People might not believe that we can bring economic miracles, but we will prove it," said the former school teacher.

The prickly issue of what to do with the one-time rebel fighters also looms.

The Maoists insist their 31,000 fighters, currently in UN-monitored camps around the country, should be brought into Nepal's army.



PHOTO: AFP

A Zimbabwean soldier secures the area as Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe tours the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair in Bulawayo on Friday.

Recounts do not overturn any opposition wins

Zimbabwe detains 215 from MDC HQ

AP, AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's electoral commission says a recount has confirmed the original results for 10 disputed parliamentary seats.

The commission says that six seats were taken by the opposition and four by President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, as previously reported.

The announcement makes it unlikely that Mugabe's party can wrest control from the opposition.

Mugabe's party would need a virtual clean sweep in the remain-

ing 13 seats subject to recounts to win back majority control of the 210-seat parliament. Most of those seats were won by the opposition.

The results of the March 29 presidential election have not yet been released, and the recount has been widely seen as a delaying tactic by Mugabe's party and state election authorities.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe police detained 215 people in a raid on the headquarters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the capital Harare, a police spokesman was quoted

Saturday.

"Police rounded up 215 people at Harvest House" on Friday, the state-controlled Herald newspaper quoted police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena as saying on Saturday.

The detainees "will be screened against participation in politically motivated criminal activities around the country," he said.

Armed riot police ransacked the offices of the MDC where some victims of post-election violence had taken refuge and drove the activists to a police station in a bus and some trucks.



PHOTO: AFP

Iranian women queue to vote at a polling station in Tehran during the second round of Iran's parliamentary elections on Friday. Iranians voted in the second round of elections confirming conservative domination of the new parliament, which would certainly be critical of controversial President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Dalai Lama wants 'serious' talks with China

AFP, Dharamshala

The Dalai Lama yesterday welcomed China's offer of talks to help resolve unrest in his Tibetan homeland but warned that anything other than "serious discussions" would be meaningless.

In a move welcomed around the world, Chinese state media said Friday that government officials would meet soon with a representative of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader.

"I have not received yet any detailed information (about the talks) but basically talk is good," the Dalai Lama said on his return to his northern Indian base of Dharamshala after a visit to the United States.

The Buddhist icon told reporters at the airport in Dharamshala

he wanted "serious discussions about how to reduce Tibetan resentment and a thorough discussion" of the problems in Tibet.

A meeting just to appease international concern would be "meaningless," the 72-year-old spiritual leader said.

Tibet experts have dismissed Beijing's offer as a desperate bid to defuse mounting international pressure over China's controversial crackdown on unrest in Tibet with less than four months before the Olympics.

They have cautioned that China's offer is unlikely to bring a breakthrough on Tibet and that it is a PR exercise ahead of the Beijing Olympics.

The spiritual leader, who has made repeated calls for dialogue with Beijing, had sought

Washington's help in improving the situation in his homeland and met followers during his two-week visit to the United States.

Beijing's announcement drew praise from the White House on Friday amid hope it could lead to a solution to the recent Tibetan unrest.

But on Saturday, China's media kept up its attacks on the Dalai Lama with the state press accusing him of destabilising the Himalayan region, which has been hit by weeks of protests over Tibet.

"The vilification of His Holiness must be stopped by the Chinese authorities because these attacks hurt the sentiments of Tibetan people very deeply," exile Tibet government spokesman Thubten Samphel told AFP.

UN urges less fighting and more talk in Iraq

AP, United Nations

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged key players in Iraq on Friday to keep violence down and to put aside party, ethnic and sectarian interests so a real political dialogue and national reconciliation can take place.

In his quarterly report to the Security Council, Ban said that the Iraqi government faces formidable challenges to reaching agreement on how to share power and resources.

"While some initial steps towards national reconciliation in Iraq have begun, more needs to be

done to help Iraqi communities resolve fundamental issues that divide them," he said.

Ban cited disputes over internal borders, power sharing, and the sharing of the country's vast oil resources.

"Once again, I urge influential figures and political parties to publicly reinforce the need for and to personally work towards political dialogue, compromise and recognition that Iraq's future depends on its leaders pursuing the Iraqi national interest, rather than individual, party, ethnic or sectarian interests," he said.

'Open war' threat only against US: Sadr

New clashes in Baghdad militia bastion kill 8

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called for an end to Iraqi bloodshed on Friday and said his threat of an "open war" applies only to US-led foreign troops stepping back from a full-blown confrontation with the government over a crackdown against his followers.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, meanwhile, took a hard line against al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia and other illegally armed groups, setting conditions for stopping mili-

tary operations against them that included surrendering weapons.

Al-Sadr's new message, which was read during prayers and posted on his Web site, eased fears that the anti-US cleric was planning to lift a nearly 8-month-old ceasefire, a move that would jeopardise recent security gains.

"If we have threatened an open war until liberation, we meant a war against the occupier," the cleric said in the statement. Al-Sadr is believed to be in Iran.

Mahdi Army fighters have

clashed daily with US-backed Iraqi security forces since al-Maliki launched a crackdown against militias on March 25. Last week, al-Sadr issued what he called a "final warning" to the Shia-led government to halt its offensive or face an "open war until liberation."

Meanwhile, fierce overnight clashes between Shia militiamen and US and Iraqi forces in Baghdad's Sadr City killed at least eight people, including two children, a local medic told AFP on Saturday.

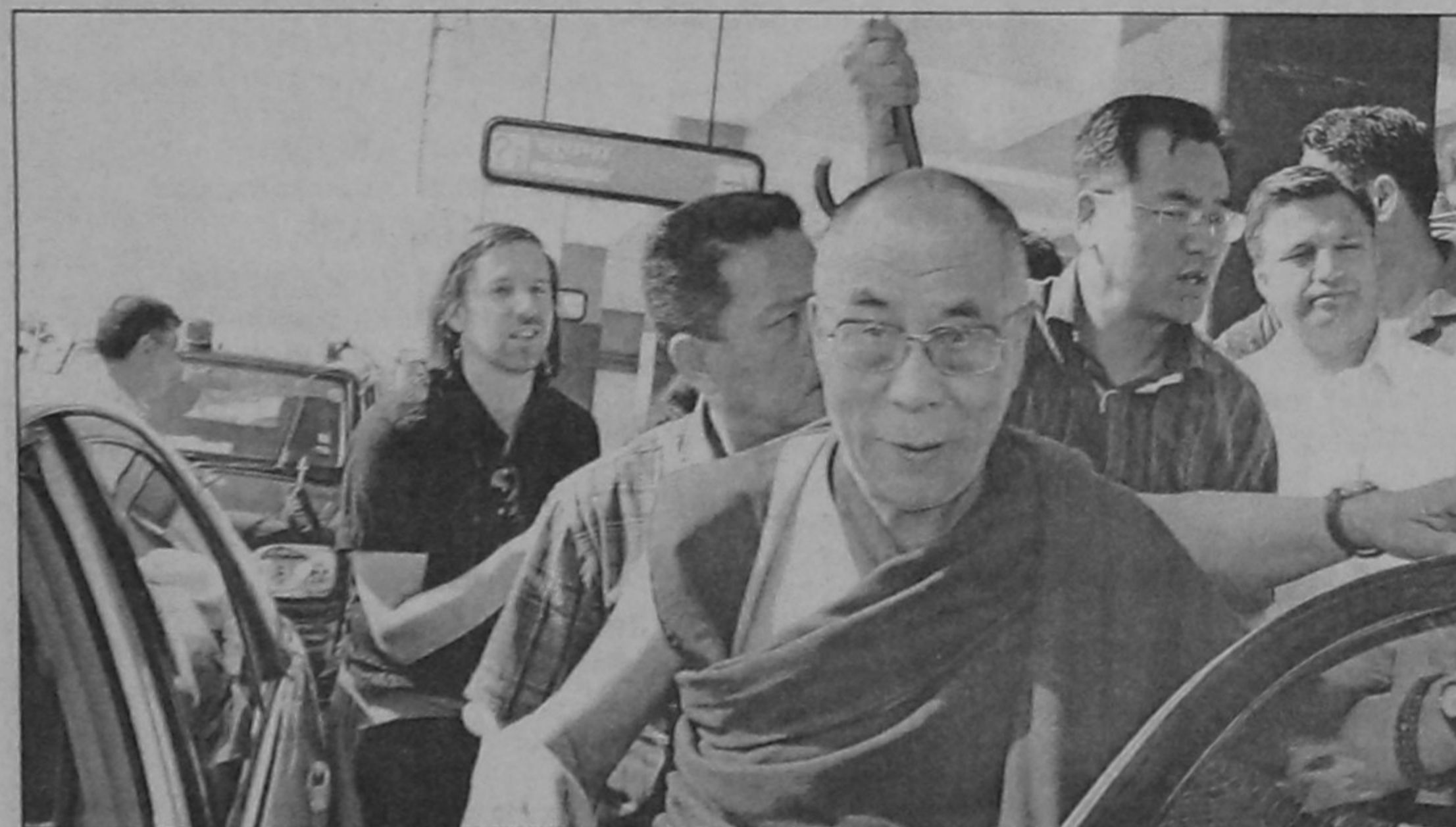


PHOTO: AFP

The Dalai Lama gets into a waiting car after arriving at Kangra Airport near Dharamshala yesterday. The Dalai Lama on Saturday welcomed China's offer of talks to help resolve unrest in his Tibetan homeland but warned that anything other than "serious discussions" would be meaningless.

Latest Lebanese presidential vote set for May 13

AFP, Beirut

A 19th attempt to elect a president has been scheduled for May 13, a spokesman for parliament speaker Nabih Berri said on Saturday as Lebanon remained mired in political deadlock.

A previous session, scheduled for April 22, was postponed because of disagreement between the anti-Syrian majority, backed by the West and most Arab states, and the opposition which is supported by Iran and Syria.

"Nabih Berri has fixed a session for May 13, at midday," spokesman Ali Hamdan said.

Speaker and opposition leader Berri has called on Lebanon's rival factions to hold talks under his auspices on forming a national unity government and on a new electoral law.

The last attempt to elect a president was postponed, despite the presence in parliament of a number of MPs from the rival group, because Berri said they did not number the requisite two-thirds quorum to hold the vote.

Lebanon is gripped by deadlock with feuding political factions unable to agree a deal to elect a replacement to pro-Syrian former president Emile Lahoud, who stepped down in November at the end of his mandate.

The country is facing its worst political crisis since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war, pitting the anti-Syrian ruling coalition against the Hezbollah-led opposition.

The parliamentary majority is demanding the immediate and unconditional election to the presidency of consensus candidate and army chief Michel Sleiman.

A solution has yet to be found despite the efforts of Arab and international mediators, and the two sides remain at loggerheads.

TENDER NOTICE

(গোডাউন ভাড়া চাই)

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health & Family Welfare				
2	Agency	ICDDR,B				
3	Procuring Entity Name	Executive Director, ICDDR,B				
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka				
5	Invitation for	Hiring of physical service facilities/warehouse for storage of imported construction materials other than cement/rod.				
6	Invitation Ref No & Date	Memo No. ICDDR,B/Mohakhali/Gyanaoloy/08-03 Date: April 27, 2008				
7	Procurement Method	National Open Tendering Method				
8	Budget and Source of Funds	IDA through RPA (GoB)				
9	Project (if applicable)	Vertical Extension and Renovation of Research and Hospital Building - ICDDR,B, Dhaka, Bangladesh				
10	Tender Package Number & Name	Package No. 06				
11	Tender Publication Date	April 27, 2008				
12	Tender Last Selling Date	May 26, 2008				
13	Tender Closing Date and Time	May 27, 2008	Time: 11:00 Hours			
14	Tender Opening Date and Time	May 27, 2008	Time: 11:30 Hours			
15	Name & Address of the office(s)	Address				
	- Selling Tender Document	Treasury Unit, 2 nd floor, Hospital Building, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.				
	- Receiving Tender Document	Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.				
	- Opening Tender Document	Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.				
16	Eligibility of Tenderer	(i) The tenderers shall be Owner / CEO of an Enterprise of Warehouse. (ii) The Warehouse should be in road side high land flood free permanent building, well secured, damp proof, well ventilated and easy entrance provision of heavy vehicles/20 ft trailer/truck/covered van. (iii) Space inside wall to wall should be 8,000 - 10,000 sqft. (iv) Rent should be quoted on monthly basis. Tax/VAT will be borne by the owner. (v) All relevant document, land/lease deed, RS/CS records, current tax, Rajuk construction permission, current bill for WASA/DESA and city corporation tax clearance etc. to be submitted with the bid offer. (vi) Warehouse will be physically inspected by ICDDR,B				
17	Identification of Lots, Tender Security, Completion Time and Price of Tender Document					
	Pkg. No.	Identification	Location	Tender Security Amount in BDT (by Pay Order in favour of ICDDR,B)	Completion Time	Price of Tender Document (in cash)
	Pkg-6	Warehouse should be in road side high land flood free permanent building, well secured, damp proof, well ventilated and easy entrance provision around Mohakhali / Tejgaon Industrial Area / Nakhla Para / Banani / Gulshan - 1	ICDDR,B 68, Saheed Tajuddin Ahamed Sarani Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212 Bangladesh	Tk.10,000.00	Ready occupancy by ICDDR,B	BDT.1000.00
18	Name of Official Inviting Tender		M. Alam			
19	Designation of Official Inviting Tender		Procurement Specialist, Gyanaoloy, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka, Bangladesh.			
20	Address of Official Inviting Tender		Mohakhali, Dhaka, Bangladesh			
21	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender		Tel: (8802)8860523-32	Fax: 02 9860620	e.mail malam@icddr.org	
22	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders.					

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