

Karzai secures 54pc votes amid fraud claims

UN-backed commission orders re-count of tainted ballots

President Hamid Karzai surpassed for the first time the 50 percent threshold needed to avoid a run-off in Afghanistan's presidential election, according to preliminary results released yesterday, but with fraud allegations rising, a UN-backed commission ordered a re-count of tainted ballots.

The chief electoral officer of the Afghan-run Independent Election Commission, Daoud Ali Najafi, said that recounting votes could take "two or three months," meaning the already over-extended election is likely far from over.

With results from almost 92 percent of the country's polling sites, Karzai has 54.1 percent of the votes, pushing him over the threshold that would allow him to declare victory outright and avoid a run-off with his

main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah.

As more results have come in from the south, where Karzai's support is strong, former foreign minister Abdullah's standing has slipped dramatically. He now has 28.3 percent of the vote.

But doubts are growing about the credibility of the election, seen as critical to the Western-backed efforts to stabilise Afghanistan and win public support for the fight against the Taliban insurgency.

The Afghan-run election commission has already quarantined ballots from more than 600 polling stations ruled to have been spoiled or tainted by fraud, out of more than 26,000 polling stations. The results announced Tuesday discount those ballots, but the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission will investigate and determine their validity.

Separately, the Electoral Complaints

Commission a separate UN-backed body charged with investigating the vote ordered a re-count Tuesday at polling stations where it had found "convincing evidence" of fraud, meaning Karzai could still have votes taken away from him. More than 720 major fraud charges have been lodged with the complaints commission.

Results were not to have been officially certified until late September, but Najafi's statement that re-counts could take months puts that timeframe into question.

Western officials say ballots have been submitted from hundreds of fake voting sites, especially across southern Afghanistan. The election commission has tallied dozens of voting sites where Karzai won nearly rounded blocks of ballots 200, 300 and 500 votes results that one Western official labeled "illogical."



PHOTO: AFP
Afghan policemen evacuate a wounded man at the site of a suicide bomb attack at the main gate of a Nato military airport in Kabul yesterday. A suicide bomber exploded a car outside Kabul's military airport Tuesday, killing three Afghan civilians and wounding 10 people including four foreign soldiers.

Nephew of Ted Kennedy rules out Senate run

AFP, New York

Joseph Kennedy, the nephew of the late Edward Kennedy, announced Monday he will not seek to fill his uncle's vacant Senate seat.

The statement, two weeks after Kennedy's death, made it unlikely that another member of the famed Democratic Party clan would try for the high office.

"Given all that my uncle accomplished, it was only natural to consider getting back involved in public office," said Kennedy on the website of the non-profit organization he founded, Citizens Energy.

"After much consideration, I have decided that the best way for me to contribute to those causes is by continuing my work at Citizens Energy Corporation."

3 killed in suicide attack on Kabul airbase

12 Taliban killed in fighting elsewhere

AFP, Kabul Kunduz

A suicide bomber attacked a Nato convoy outside Kabul's military airport yesterday, killing three civilians while 12 Taliban militants were killed in fighting in northern Afghanistan.

The attack, which came with Afghanistan on edge over the marathon count from disputed elections, wounded six Afghan civilians along with three US soldiers and one from Belgium, officials said.

"It was a suicide attack

outside the main gate of the military base at the airport," said Colonel Koziel Bart, a spokesman for the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

Bart said the airbase had been sealed off. Military air traffic resumed after an hour-long suspension.

Meanwhile 12 Taliban militants and one Afghan policeman have been killed in a six-hour gun battle and related bomb blast in northern Afghanistan, a senior official said Tuesday.

US embassy expansion plans spur rumours, concern in Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

America's plans for a major expansion of its diplomatic presence in Pakistan, including the possible takeover of a bombed luxury hotel near the Taliban heartland, have heightened tensions and bred rumours in a population rife with anti-US sentiment.

Among the tales being floated: that 1,000 US Marines will land in the capital, that Americans will set up a Guantanamo-style prison and that the infamous security

contractor once called Blackwater will come in and wreak havoc.

The frenzy, much of it whipped up by the media and Islamist political parties, shows the difficulties for the US as it seeks to increase its engagement in a country where a flourishing militant movement is threatening the war effort in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The US says it needs to expand mainly to disburse billions of dollars more in aid to Pakistan, an impoverished nation of 175 million people.

Pak PM seeks swift US funds for Taliban battle

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani urged the United States to speed up delivery of aid, saying the nation needed more aircraft, ammunition and funds to battle Taliban rebels.

US officials have praised Pakistan's recent military offensives against the Taliban in northwest Swat region, while operations are expanding into the insurgent strongholds in the semi-

autonomous tribal belt bordering Afghanistan.

Speaking to a US congressional delegation in the capital Islamabad, Gilani "called on the US to expedite passage" of bills that would see aid to Pakistan triple, the prime minister's office said in a statement late Monday.

Aid was upholding peace in Swat and the tribal regions by funding healthcare, industry and infrastructure, the prime minister said.

He added that "Pakistan's

Armed Forces needed immediate replenishment of aviation spares and ammunition as well as the much-needed helicopters and counter intelligence equipment for winning the war against terrorism."

The US senate in June approved a bill which provides 7.5 billion dollars in humanitarian and economic aid over five years and recommends that level for another five years while tying US military aid to progress against extremists.

Chinese scientists claim to have filmed 'UFO' for 40 minutes

ANI, London

Chinese scientists claim that they filmed an unidentified flying object for about 40 minutes, during the solar eclipse on July 22.

Researchers at the Purple Mountain Observatory in Nanjing have said that they will spend the next 12 months studying the footage before reaching any conclusions.

In an interview with sina.com, Ji Hai-sheng, the director of the observatory, said that scientists would not be speculating publicly on the nature of what was captured on film until it had been properly studied.



PHOTO: AFP
Family members arrive to find out the fate of Chinese miners killed or trapped in a mine in Pingdingshan, central China's Henan province yesterday. At least 35 people were killed and 44 others were trapped after a gas explosion at a coalmine where a total of 93 people were working. Fourteen were able to escape death.

Pak nukes safe from terror attacks: US

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has expressed satisfaction over the security arrangements at Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

In an interview with Al-Jazeera TV channel Monday, Gates said the US considered Pakistani arrangements to secure its nuclear arsenal against Islamic terrorists sufficient and adequate.

There has been mounting anxiety over the Islamic nation's nuclear arsenal of 80 to 100 weapons in view of threats to the Pakistan Taliban.

Last month, Shaun Gregory, director of the Pakistan Security Research Unit at the University of Bradford in Britain, said that

home-grown terrorists three attacked Pakistan's nuclear facilities in 2007 and 2008, though Islamabad denied these attacks.

The US defence secretary told the Qatar-based television network that as per their assessment the 'security arrangements for the Pakistani nuclear capabilities are sufficient and adequate'.

He said Islamabad has assured the US that it has adequate security arrangements for their nuclear weapons and related laboratories.

Gates said the Pakistani government and the military have performed beyond American expectations since the installation of the civilian government 16 months ago.

Petition filed in Pak SC against Musharraf, General Kayani

ANI, Islamabad

A petition has been filed in Pakistan Supreme Court on Monday against 481 persons including former president Pervez Musharraf and former premier Shaukat Aziz and Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani.

The petition filed by Engineer Mohammed Jameel, Chairman Pakistan Communist Party, said the PPP has struck deal with the dictators and avoiding proceedings under Article six of the constitution.

Four former governors, chief ministers, former Speaker of National Assembly, former

chairman Senate, former chief justice Abdul Hameed Doggar, Sharifuddin Pirzada and former attorney general Malik Qayyum have been made party in the petition.

The petitioner has also made Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Tariq Majid, 12 Lt. Generals Asim Bajwa and the chiefs of ISI and MI as party in the petition, which has been filed under clause-III of the Article 184 of the constitution, The Nation reports.

Meanwhile, former president Pervez Musharraf has said that he will soon return to Pakistan to be among the people of the country.

Gossiping is fundamental to being human!

ANI, London

Gossiping is fundamental to being human, and this is what separates us from animals, claims a social psychologist.

While speaking at British Science Festival, Dr Nicholas Emler, from University of Surrey said it was fundamental to being human and gossiping was the reason we developed our unique ability to talk.

Despite its "dismal reputation", gossiping has allowed people to build far bigger, richer and complex societies than other creatures.

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