

Ban fears violence will mar Afghan vote result

AFP, AP, Kabul

United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon fears violence will mar the announcement of the Afghan presidential election results, the organisation said in a statement yesterday.

In his quarterly report on the war-torn nation, Ban writes: "The level of alleged electoral irregularities has generated significant political turbulence leading to fears of a return to violence when election results are announced."

The secretary general concludes that a "lack of access to parts of the country owing to the ongoing conflict... seriously hampered the transparency of the elections" but that institutions such as the Electoral Complaints Commission were able to address many problems.

Based on preliminary results, incumbent Afghan president Hamid Karzai is ahead in the polls, with 54.6 percent of the votes declared valid, against 27.8 percent for his main rival, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah.

The result will not be finalised until the outcome of a number of investigations

into charges of electoral fraud.

If a significant number of votes are invalidated, Karzai's score could edge below 50 percent, forcing him into a second round run-off with Abdullah in a second turn.

"A credible audit and recount process is now coming to its conclusion" after which "it will be of critical importance for the results to be accepted by all so that the election of Afghanistan's future president can be certified and a new government can be formed", Ban adds.

The Secretary-General also stated that it is "imperative" that the international community maintain a long-term commitment to Afghanistan, while adding that there must be a "decisive shift" in that relationship, the UN statement said.

"The government must be enabled and determined to assume all the responsibilities that belong to a sovereign State," Ban was quoted as saying.

"The international community, for its part, must play a role that is clearly one of support."

Corruption and incompetence in the Afghan government are regularly con-

demned by the international community.

Afghans voted on August 20 in the second presidential election in the nation's history.

Meanwhile, rising violence ahead of Afghanistan's disputed presidential election made August the deadliest month of the year for civilians, the UN said, warning in a new report that attacks could spike again when the final vote results are announced.

A total of 1,500 civilians died in Afghanistan from January through August, according to the report released late Friday. About three-quarters of the deaths were blamed on militants. The UN report did not specify the August death toll, but said the month was the deadliest of the year as the Taliban stepped up an intimidation campaign to discourage Afghans from voting in the Aug. 20 election.

The UN said coalition forces were to blame for about a quarter of civilian deaths in 2009, most of them in airstrikes. The top Nato commander, US Gen. Stanley McChrystal, has made protecting Afghan civilians a top priority.



Pakistani security officials secure the site after a suicide bomb blast in Peshawar yesterday while bystanders help injured suicide blast victims at the site (Inset). Suicide bombers blew up vehicles packed with explosives, killing 16 people in northwest Pakistan on Saturday and escalating a campaign of revenge against security forces, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

10 dead or missing as storm hits Philippines

AFP, Manila

At least 10 people were reported dead or missing in massive floods in the Philippine capital as tropical storm Ketsana lashed the eastern side of the country on Saturday, radio reports said.

The government declared Manila and numerous provinces to be in a "state of calamity". Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said, as heavy rains brought by the storm caused the worst flooding seen in the capital in some 20 years.

A wall, weakened by floodwaters, collapsed in a suburb of Manila, killing a father and child while four children drowned in flooding elsewhere in the city, radio station DZMM said.

Three other people were swept away by a swollen river outside the capital, it said.

Over 1,800 people were forced to flee their homes and take refuge in evacuation centres due to rising waters, the civil defence office said.

Flooding was reported in many districts with waters in some areas reaching as high as the rooftops of one-storey buildings, the civil defence office said.

The storm, bearing winds of 85km (53 miles) per hour with gusts of 100 kph, hit the main island of Luzon near the town of Infanta at about 0200 GMT Saturday, moving west at 19 kilometres per hour, the weather station said.

Government weather forecaster Gener Quitlong said the equivalent of one month's worth of rain fell on the city in less than a day.

"We knew there would be rain but not like this," Quitlong told reporters.

One of the three airport terminals in Manila was forced to cancel and divert flights after the flooding hampered its electrical system.

Local officials interviewed on radio said they were moving to evacuate more of their residents.

Huge traffic jams clogged the roads in the capital as floodwaters caused many vehicles to stall.

Local officials made appeals on air, asking rescue agencies to send rubber boats to rescue stranded people.

In a suburb of Manila, residents in a flooded area were seen rescuing children from rooftops by placing them in inflated inner tubes before dragging them to higher ground.

The second level of a three-step storm alert was raised over the eastern provinces of Luzon while the first level alert was hoisted over metropolitan Manila and surrounding areas, the government said.

Talking to a local news channel from New York, Qureshi said that his meeting with his Indian counterpart SM Krishna would be held Sunday, adding terrorism is not only their concern, but it was concern of Pakistan also.

"In my opinion, resumption of composite dialogue is the only way to resolve all the issues which are of great importance for both the



Filipinos help to lift a boy up onto the roof of a building to escape floodwaters brought by Tropical Storm Ketsana in the Quezon City near Manila yesterday. At least 10 people were reported dead or missing in massive floods in the Philippine capital as the tropical storm lashed the eastern side of the country.

GLOBAL WARMING WOES Maldives plans cabinet meet underwater

AFP, Paris

Politicians rarely admit when they sink to new depths but for the Maldives government, it's a badge of honour when fighting global warming is concerned.

President Mohamed Nasheed is to host an underwater cabinet meeting on October 24 to draw attention to the impact of climate change on the Indian Ocean archipelago, his office told AFP on Friday.

"The purpose of the underwater cabinet meeting is to show commitment from the highest political level to the 350.org Global Day of Climate Action," it quoted Deputy Undersecretary Aminath Shauna as saying.

350.org is a grassroots group campaigning for present levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) to be reduced to 350 parts per million (ppm) to restore Earth's atmosphere to safe levels.

Clad in scuba gear and communicating by whiteboards and hand signals, the 14 cabinet members will approve a statement "from Maldivian citizens" that will be presented at the December 7-18 UN climate summit in Copenhagen.

Suu Kyi eases stance on Myanmar sanctions

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar opposition icon Aung San Suu Kyi has eased her stance on sanctions, her lawyer said yesterday, as the country marked the second anniversary of the junta's bloody crackdown on monk-led protests.

The detained Nobel laureate has written to military regime leader Than Shwe offering suggestions about how to get Western sanctions against the country lifted, after years of espousing punitive measures against the ruling generals.

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